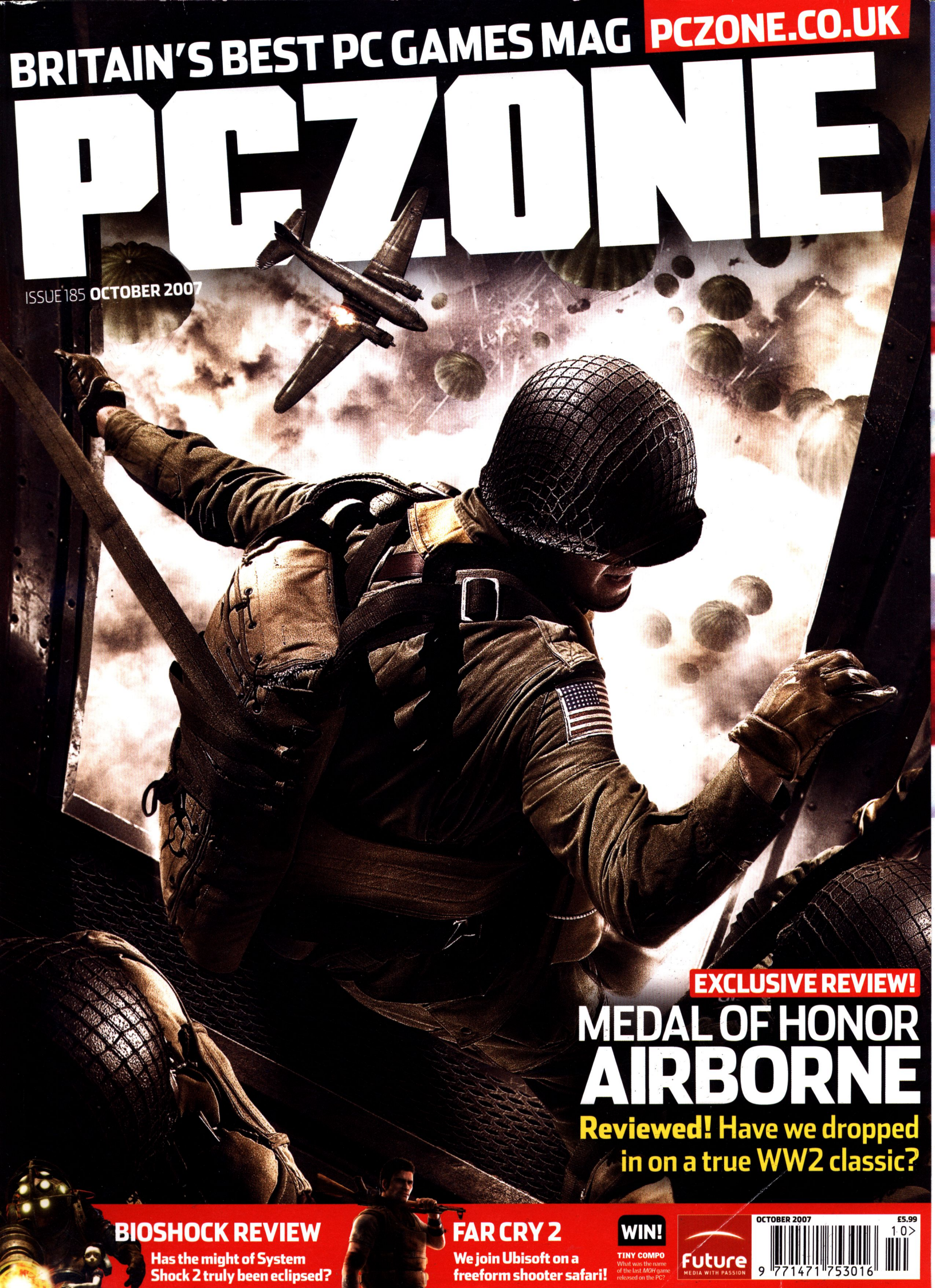
BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

PCZONE.CO.UK

PCZONE

ISSUE 185 OCTOBER 2007



EXCLUSIVE REVIEW!

MEDAL OF HONOR AIRBORNE

Reviewed! Have we dropped in on a true WW2 classic?

BIOSHOCK REVIEW

Has the might of System Shock 2 truly been eclipsed?

FAR CRY 2

We join Ubisoft on a freeform shooter safari!

WIN!

TINY COMPO

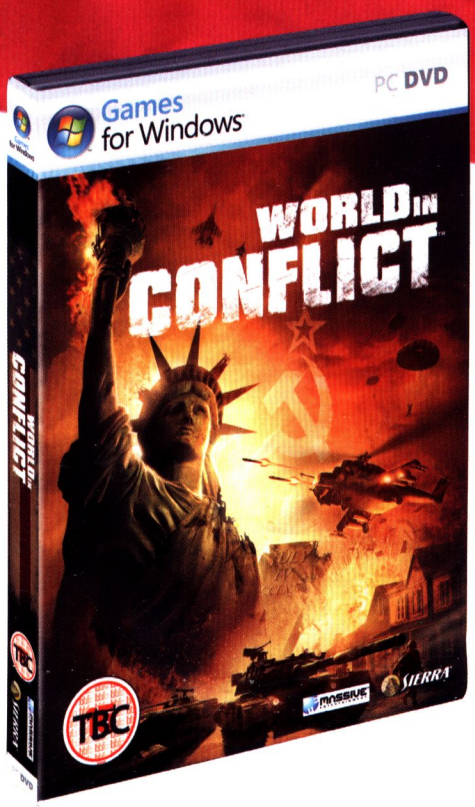
What was the name of the last *MOH* game released on the PC?

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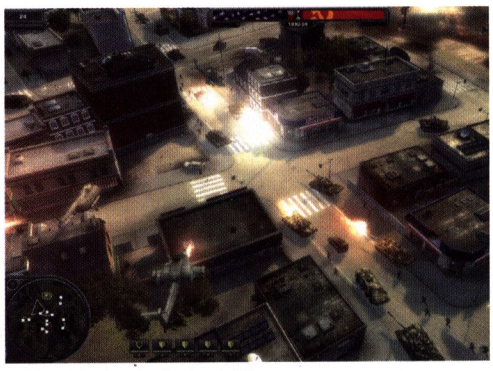
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THE AMERICAN NIGHTMARE.

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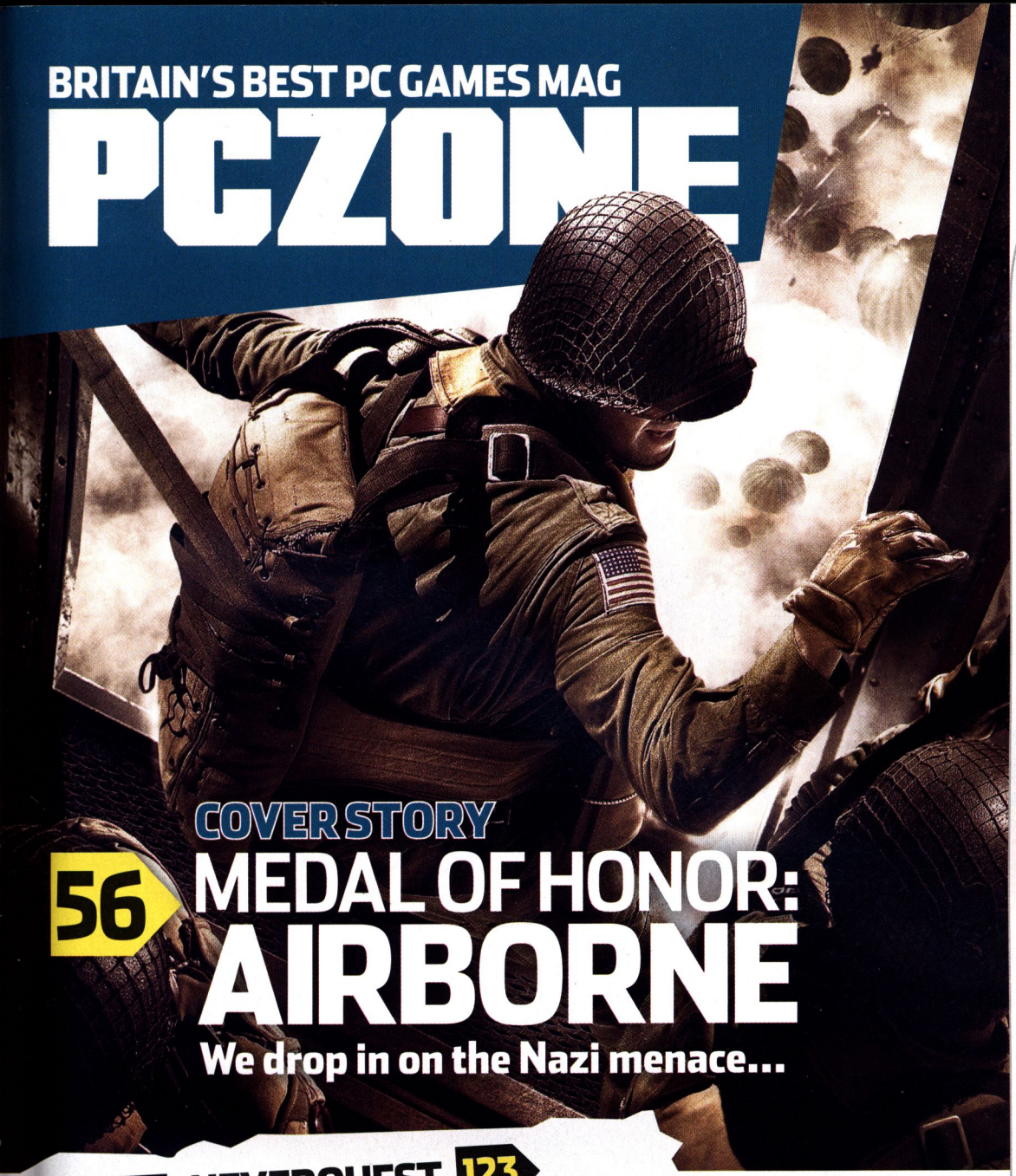
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COVER STORY

56 MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE

We drop in on the Nazi menace...



NEVERQUEST 123

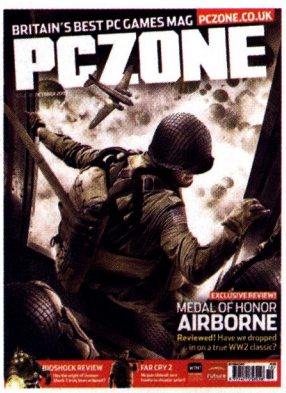
"We're to terminate someone with extreme prejudice..."



FALLOUT 3 44

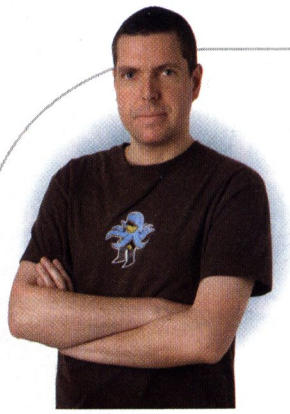
BETHESDA REINVENT ONE OF THE PC'S MOST CHERISHED FRANCHISES...

WHAT'S ON THE COVER?



56 MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE
62 BIOSHOCK
20 FAR CRY 2

Too busy? *PC ZONE* in 62 words...
The chances of you reading this before thumbing to the *BioShock* review score is roughly zero, so you'll be aware of how good it is, even if you haven't read why. Are you excited like you haven't been in a year? Is your every organ aflame with impatient desire? While you're cooling down, why not read the rest of the mag too?



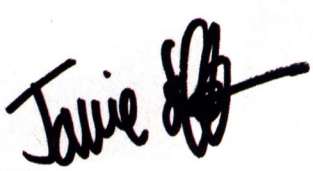
2007 HEAVEN

RIGHT, I'M PROBABLY going to invite flaming internet anger with the following statement, but hey, it's a hobby: 2007 will be the best year ever for PC games.

The gaming gods have conspired to delay certain titles, in some cases to the point where they had to change the name (hello *UT3*), so that from September we're looking at a smorgasbord of the greatest games for PC ever.

For starters, in this issue we have reviews of the mighty *BioShock* (p62), *Medieval II: Total War – Kingdoms* (p68), *MOH: Airborne* (p56) and *Civ IV: Beyond The Sword* (p72). Spawning soon after are *Company Of Heroes: Opposing Fronts*, *Enemy Territory: Quake Wars*, *Assassin's Creed*, *COD4: Modern Warfare*, *Guild Wars: Eye Of The North*, *Half-Life 2: Episode Two*, *Portal*, *Team Fortress 2*, *PES 2008*, *Clive Barker's Jericho*, *Hellgate: London*, *Kane & Lynch: Dead Men* and *Crysis* – many of which could be genre-defining games.

The fact that this happy gaming frenzy has occurred during a turbulent crossover between Microsoft's operating systems XP and Vista is a kick in the balls, but I don't think even this cock-up will be enough to knock the PC from its stride. 2007: best year ever. Let the arguments begin...



Jamie Sefton, editor

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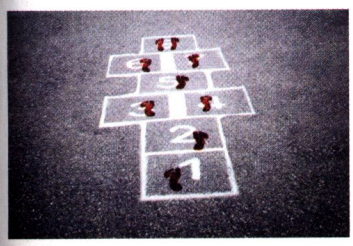


REVIEW

62 BIOSHOCK

We've got high expectations for Irrational's sub-oceanic adventure. It's time to get soaked...

40 UPFRONT **F.E.A.R.**



68 REVIEW **Medieval II: Kingdoms**



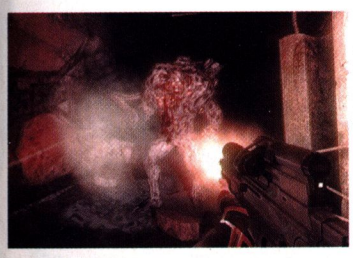
114 FREEPLAY **Insurgency**



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34 UPFRONT **Jericho**



HEAR US SPEAK! 118

PUBCASTS DO WE KNOW NO BOUNDS? OUR PRESENCE ON THE INTERNET IS PROOF THAT WE DO NOT



50 **HAVE YOU MISSED OUT?** Ever had a gaming moment that felt unique to you? We have, and now you can actually read about them!

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FREEPLAY

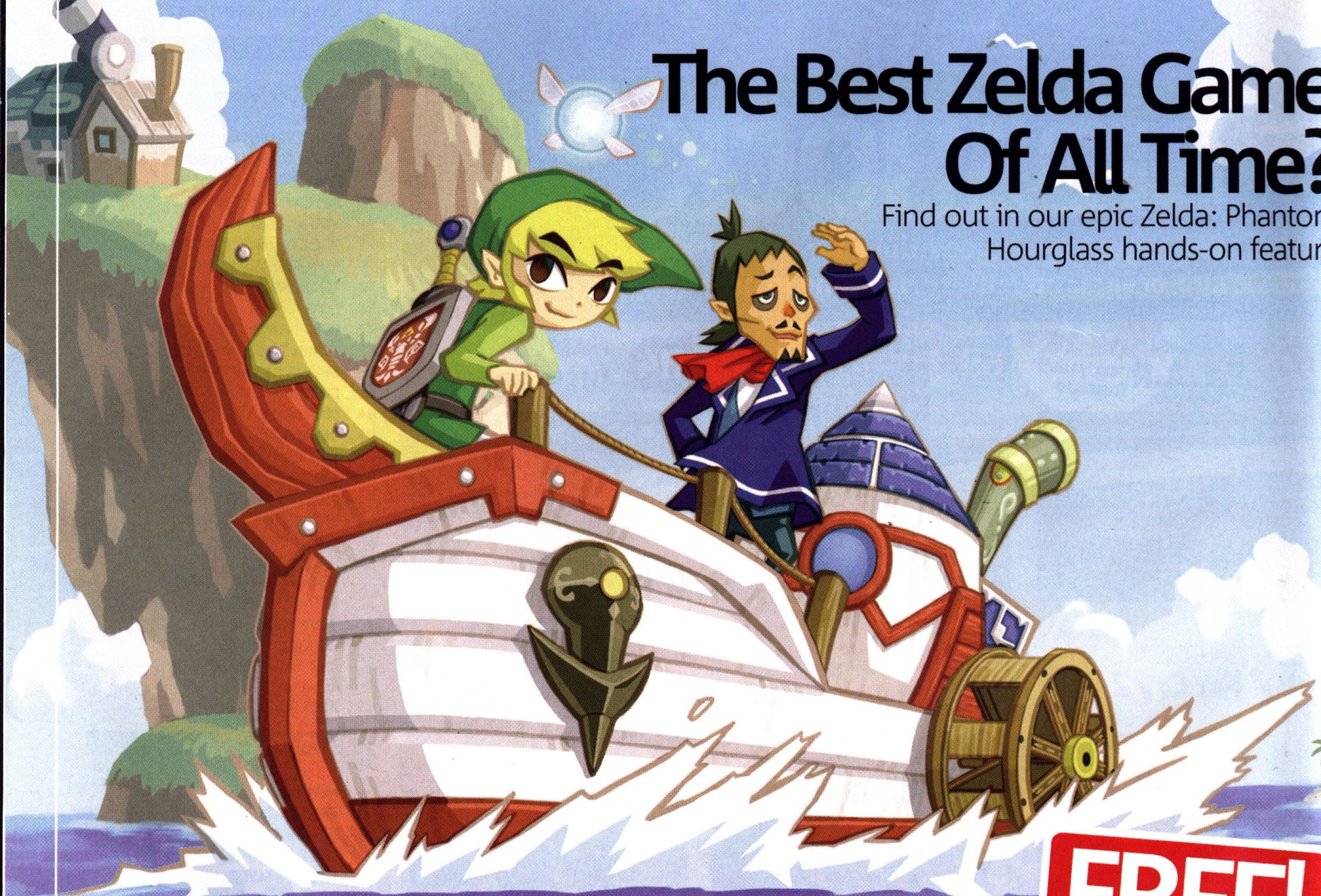
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Find out in our epic Zelda: Phanton Hourglass hands-on featur

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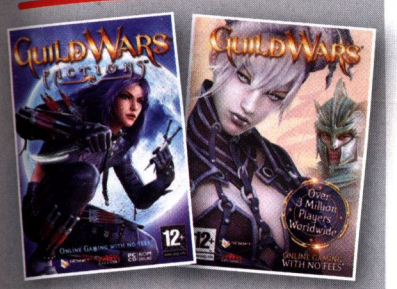


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Closing date: December 31, 2007

MEET THE TEAM

If you go down to the woods today...



JON 'LOG' BLYTH
Chief funsmith
AGE: 33
LIKES: Malamutes
DISLIKES: King Charles Spaniels
FANCIES: Alsatians
FAVE GAME: Can I say *BioShock*?
PLAYING NOW: *NWN2, Geometry Wars, Project Fashion*

Tearful Jonathan 'Log' Blyth (known to his mother simply as 'Log') this month decided to go to Thorpe Park on the day a month's rainfall hit the ground in a matter of minutes. Unfortunately, due to fear of lightning and ongoing monsoon conditions, every single, solitary ride was rendered non-operational and Log was forced to eat Kentucky Fried Chicken and play *Dance Dance Revolution* for several hours before going home and getting stuck in traffic. Though rather a mundane tale, this day is actually a perfect metaphor for Log's continuing existence on planet Earth.



CLARE LYDON
Overseer
Clare's expert badgering is the reason our mag gets made every month. If this is the last issue you ever read, it's because she's leaving, and in her absence we've started hitting each other with rocks.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Abba!



WILL PORTER
Heir apparent
Much fun has been had this month chasing Will round the office with a print-out of the deaths in the final *Harry Potter*. When cornered, he confided he had a 'thing' for Ginny Weasley.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Civ IV: Beyond The Sword



STEVE HOGARTY
Underwater correspondent
Steve played *BioShock* for such a long sitting this month that he got motion sickness and threw up. He then went straight back to playing, only to suffer from the bends at the game's completion.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
BioShock



JAMIE SEFTON
Groom
Sefton this month defied years of expectation by getting married to a nice lady called Jackie. Their every moment is now consumed saying, "How much?" in unison and chuckling.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Dark Messiah



SUZY WALLACE
Feline specialist
Wallace has been perusing the moggies at the Cat Protection League; pointing, cooing and filming them sleeping. Said cats are now hopeful that a restraining order will prevent further intrusion.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Loki



KEVIN PRUITT
Artistic absentee
No sooner had Redneck Kev passed his British Citizenship test, in which he expressed undying love for tea and croquet, he announced he was leaving. The parallels with *Green Card* are striking.
WHAT ARE YOU PLAYING:
Facebook

STUFF THAT'S HELPED US THIS MONTH... *BioShock* being the best thing not only since sliced bread, but also the very concept of bread itself.
STUFF THAT HASN'T HELPED US THIS MONTH... Scary-looking contracts, Will having to be diplomatic and the shittest weather ever...

STUFF WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

BIOSHOCK 300 Mins Even better than we expected. Ken Levine is a ruddy genius!

THE WHITBY WEDDING OF THE YEAR 54 Mins Vows! Greyhounds! Food! Karaoke! Romance! Relatives with amusing Yorkshire accents!

BIBLICAL SCENES MADE FROM LEGO 67 Mins Suzy just can't get enough, Will finds them spiritually lacking

SMALL HANDS AND PRINGLE TUBES 35 Mins Sure, small hands aren't manly, but for Pringle-retrieval they're just right!

REGGIE FILS-AIME 32 Mins And the fear of going mad and attacking the Nintendo president when you're occupying the same lift

WOW EXPANSION PREDICTIONS 34 Mins We're betting on a new underwater area with playable Murlocs. Are we right?

CLARE AND KEVIN BUGGERING OFF 77 Mins The office is now a less joyful place. With significantly less Abba

MAKE-UP ETIQUETTE 65 Mins "Blusher before foundation? You're the crappest cross-dresser I've ever known!"

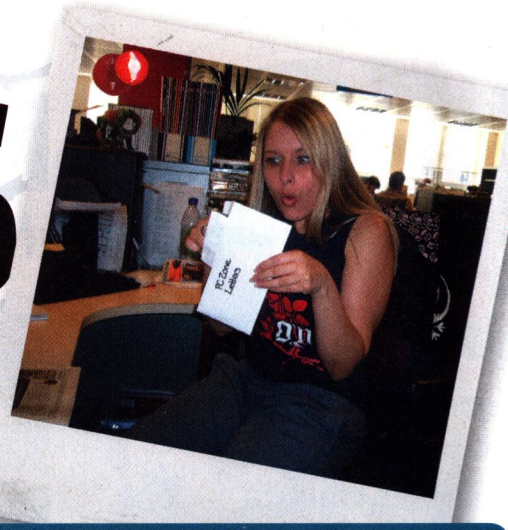
SATAN WORSHIP 29 Mins And its place in contemporary society. Quite frankly, they can all go to hell

THE AMAZING DISAPPEARING IPODS! 73 Mins One drunkenly left wedged in a hotel sofa, the other lost in a drawer. Both safe!

WIN! Every year, hundreds of competition entries gather in a certain place in the deep waters off the coast of Scotland, before bravely swimming up the mouth of a certain river. Because they're swimming upstream and have problems jumping up the waterfalls, they all die meaningless deaths – but whoever sent the one that got the furthest wins a game. The one that died last this month was that of M Burton from Staffordshire, who wins a copy of *Project: Snowblind*. Send this month's entries to: 'Jive! Jive Jive! 185', *PC ZONE*, Future Publishing, 2 Balcombe Street, London NW1 6NW.

GENERAL COMPETITION TERMS & CONDITIONS: 1. Only completed entries received before the closing date will be entered. 2. Winners will be notified by post. 3. No cash alternative. 4. Prizes not necessarily as shown. 5. No correspondence will be entered into. 6. The editor's decision is final. 7. Responsibility cannot be accepted for lost or undelivered entries. 8. Competitions are not open to readers outside the UK or employees of Future or its affiliated companies, their families, agents or anyone professionally connected with the competition. Toot! Toot!

LETTERS





When there's letters to be read, *Suzy Wallace*, through the use of hands and eyes, can read them...

KING OF LETTERS

HISTORY LESSON

Like Jamie, I'm an avid *Call Of Duty* fan and have thoroughly enjoyed all the previous outings in the series. However, I find the notion of *Call Of Duty 4* being set in an imaginary conflict disturbing. Let's face it – war isn't great (I've had the displeasure of seeing it myself), but surely the greatest thing the recent glut of WWII games has produced is some form of education for those with no previous knowledge of the sacrifices and hardships involved.

I was hoping that *Call Of Duty 4* would have been a Korean or a Far Eastern WWII experience, pushing those frequently forgotten battles to the front of people's minds. Don't get me wrong – I love fragging a Strogg on some distant home world – but I can't forget the way I felt after completing *Medal Of Honor: Allied Assault*'s D-Day level: to wit, "Thank bugger I wasn't really there." So come on, developers – don't bottle it. Educate us a little while we kill those pixels, leave us with a sense of history and stop producing safe environments for us to wage war in. Let us remember them.

Glenn Brown

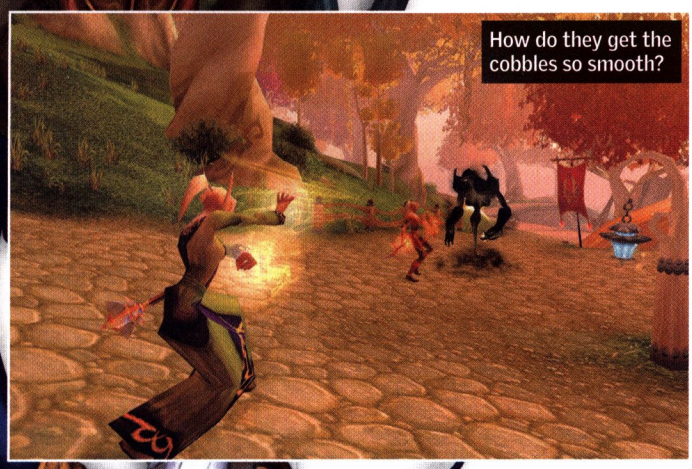


I couldn't agree with you more about the WWII education, Glenn. I for one could hardly keep my eyes open in history lessons at school, but being immersed in the sheer brutality of the conflict via videogames was a real eye-opener for me, engaging me in a way that reading a book never could. I suppose the Far Eastern WWII experience has already been done by the *Medal Of Honor* team with *Pacific Assault* – plus, let's be honest, another such game would just be another opportunity for the Americans to pretend they won the war all by themselves. As for *COD4* using an imaginary setting, that's due to its modern-day context. After all, as informative and interesting as we find these WWII games, I don't think anyone's quite ready for *Medal Of Honor: Iraq* just yet.

WIN!



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WOW WHO?

I've just read Lewis Burnell's letter about *WOW* not being the world's greatest game (Kings Of Letters, issue 181), but the fact is, at the moment, it is the best – and *Burning Crusade* has just reinforced everyone's beliefs. Also, the game is solely about grinding, and an MMO without grinding just isn't an MMO. In fact, the G in MMORPG should stand for 'grinding'.

As for the new races, I agree that I'm doing the same class again to the same level I got it to last time. But the new areas are what *Burning Crusade* is about, and with these come new instances. More sitting up until you don't have the energy to press the buttons. But that's the essence of *WOW*, and as for the PvP, Blizzard didn't make it like that – the people who play it did. More grinding for whatever epic stuff you need from Alterac Valley or spending two/three months in the area to get a shiny Nether Drake to sit in Shattrath on. I reckon all that money I spent on Azeroth was the best money I ever spent, because otherwise, I might still be hunched in my room shooting people on my PS2 in *GTA*.

Charlie Latimer

First off, there's nothing wrong with the *GTA* series (even if you've crossed

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"Now, I couldn't give a toss about *Manhunt 2*. But the precedent this might give... Not a pretty thought"
John Murphy thinks we should be up in arms over the *Manhunt 2* situation

What's so violent, eh? It's just like Cluedo.

to the dark side to play it). Second, having refused to ever play *WOW* myself, you're talking to the wrong person. To me, your letter read like those bits of the animated *Peanuts* series where the adults were talking. Mwa, mwa, mwaaaa...

BAN THESE EVIL GAMES?

The *Manhunt 2* ban – this is why gamers need to unite and protest. I live in Ireland, where *Manhunt 2* isn't allowed at all. Even if you buy it in another part of the world, customs will still destroy it when you enter Ireland.

Now generally, I couldn't give a toss about *Manhunt 2*. I played the first game and was bored senseless within minutes. But the precedent of banning games this might give... It's not a pretty thought. What gamers need to do is form groups and make as large a fuss as possible to stop this from potentially ruining gaming for everyone.

This is what I'm doing: I'm getting all my friends who are into gaming to email the Censorship Board in Ireland and complain about how wrong this is. So everyone, go get your friends and your online buddies and make a fuss. Go to your government's websites, find the censorship department's contact email address or phone number and make sure that we're heard and they know we're most decidedly not happy about this.

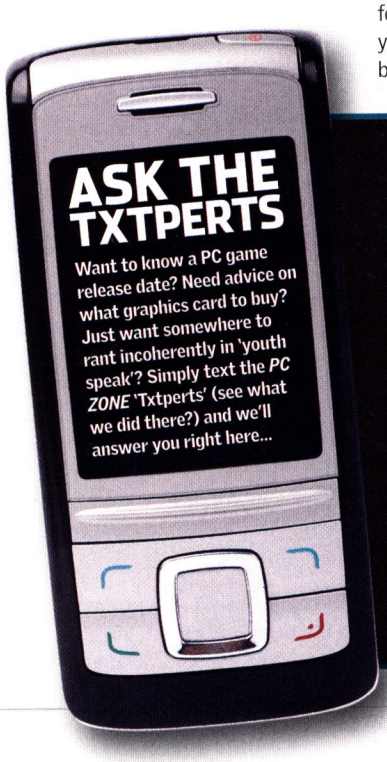
John Murphy

Contrary to popular belief, the ruling by the BBFC (along with the Irish Film Censor's Office) doesn't mean that *Manhunt 2* has been banned – it's just been refused a classification in its current form. That means the game can't legally be sold in the UK or Ireland – but interestingly, it's *not* illegal for you to own a copy. So if you brought back a copy you bought abroad, customs wouldn't be able to touch it. We know – we phoned up the Irish Film Censor's Office. But to return to the general issue, there are very few games that even need to go through the BBFC for rating, so this is (hopefully) unlikely to be a growing trend. Though we're not particularly keen on some guy in a suit telling us what we can and can't play. If he wore a top hat and sported a cane and a twiddly moustache, though...

FREE WORLD

What's all this freeform crap about? Freeform this, freeform that – it's like they just want to overwhelm you with choice until you can take no more and develop a brain tumour. Just because you can choose from 900-degrees of good or evil, or 11,000 different class combinations doesn't mean that it's a good game.

I liked the old games which guided you through a compelling story without forcing you to make decisions, leaving you to make your own fun rather than be provided with it. I want to be told



ASK THE TXTPERTS

Want to know a PC game release date? Need advice on what graphics card to buy? Just want somewhere to rant incoherently in 'youth speak'? Simply text the *PC ZONE* 'Txtperts' (see what we did there?) and we'll answer you right here...

You bastards! You BASTARDS! I had no idea that you actually <*STALKER* PLOT SPOILER>! Ruined! Porter, you pecker-head!
Robert Bullen

Well, at the end of *BioShock*...

When's *Guild Wars: Eye Of The North* set to be released?
Ben Hawke

The worldwide release is set for August 31.

What's the release date for *Duke Nukem*?
Sham, Babs, Zub, Immi & Asim

I'm pretty sure it was January 1996. ;)

Vista sucks anus, but I like games. Am I stuck with it if I want to play too?
ComradeWolf No

What? Sucking anus? No, you can do without.



Text your PC game-related nonsense to 87103, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space, and continue with your text – and don't forget your name. Texts should be no more than 160 characters long.

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YOUR SHOUT!

SEND US YOUR REVIEWS WIN A FREE GAME!

LOTR ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR

Sent in by Andrew Tatham

PC ZONE score: 87%

World Of Warcraft beware! *LOTR Online* is a serious contender for best MMO of all time. Codemasters' game looks as fantastic as the Peter Jackson movies, while keeping much of the stuff that was jettisoned from the Tolkien books. And as well as having a decent array of classes (such as Burglar and Champion), it has a nifty card up its elvish sleeve – Monster Play. When your character reaches level 10, you can become a hugely powerful creature such as an orc-reaver, who can tear enemies apart with burning blades. You don't have to be a fan of the books to like this game – this has something for everyone. Buy it!

Your shout: 93%



Send your reviews with a maximum of 100 words and a percentage score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.


It's so beautiful, we're welling up...

where to go and what to do, as I believe being forced into doing anything (who really wants the option to be able to boil eggs, or whatever?) is less freeform than being forced to follow a linear storyline. Implementing stupid shit that isn't even fun does not provide meaningful content.

I don't want to make choices; I want people to make them for me.

Jim McDonald

Boiling eggs? You do realise *Boiling Point* isn't actually about the subtle art of egg cooking, don't you, Jim? Anyway, the debate on freeform vs scripted gameplay is one that often crops up at *ZONE*. Both approaches have their merits, but we reckon a perfect blend of the two is the way to go. However, if you really hate choices that much, Jim, we do have a suggestion for you. It's called TV.

WASTE PAPER

In response to your request for readers to send in pictures of their *PC ZONE* collections, here's a photo which shows some of my collection. I have bought every magazine from the first issue and have been a subscriber for most of that time. The first issues are in the second column from the left. I haven't thrown away a single copy yet, so I have to store most of them in the loft!

Mark Sheehan

Blimey! If you recycled all of those, you could probably make a serviette or something.

MUM'S THE WORD

In your August issue, Suzy reported in the Reviews editorial that she had been berated by Carol Fox for poking a little light fun at her own mother. As the only son of Ms Fox, I have to apologise.

It's only due to me leaving an issue of your great magazine around that my mother had cause to pick it up and scan through it. I think she imagines herself to be a 'great source of knowledge' about all things computer-related – this in spite of the fact she used to ask me where she should put her floppies into her laptop, waving the external CD drive around. This is the same woman who made technological blunders which would make anyone who's read the thousands of 'Tech Support True Stories' wince. The woman who, when we got our first household PC, spent several minutes trying to figure out why the base unit was whirring but she couldn't see anything (she didn't know she had to turn the monitor on, and *then* couldn't find the giant button on the front of it).

My mother's email to Suzy was utterly unwarranted and unprovoked, and speaking as the "snot-nosed brat" who makes fun of her various blunders, I feel I should apologise on her behalf, to Suzy and the readers in general.

My mother is a HUGE n00b.

Benjamin Fox

Benjamin, we should get our mums together and set up our own technical-support line.

GAME ON

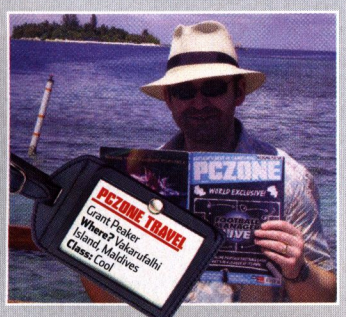
I may be getting on in years, but there's something about battling with thousands of men or standing toe to toe with your foe that makes life worth the trouble, whether you're engaging in a spot of *Half-Life*, *Medal Of Honor* or *Total War* or just getting down and dirty in *Painkiller*. For if men and women were born to fight, where better to do it than on a computer screen? Best thing since Hitler died.

Dave

Too true, Dave. I also prefer dying in a virtual world to real life – that way my clothes don't get all messy. PCZ

PCZONE AROUND THE WORLD





We want photos of you with *PC ZONE* in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Candid celeb shots count double. Every one printed wins a prize!

WHAT'S ON THE PCZ HARD DRIVE?



SYSTEM SHOCK 2
www.irrationalgames.com/shock2
We heard there's a sequel or something coming out, so we fired it up for a quick refresher on what makes a great game.

ARTRAGE
www.ambientdesign.com
It's not free, but the trial version's cool. It's just like MS Paint, except more like real paint. We keep doing happy little trees.

DUNGEON MASTER
www.dungeon-master.com
Sometimes we don't want the massive freeform nature of *Oblivion*. No, sometimes we just want to kill our own characters by walking into walls.

WHAT'S ON YOUR HARD DRIVE?



THIS MONTH: YAKKERN (AKA JEZ KERN)

ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS BETA
"It's a bit like Assault mode in *Unreal Tournament*. Best weapon used with any success so far: GDF Sniper Rifle."

COLIN MCRAE: DIRT
Yakkern's loving the game, but isn't so keen on our transatlantic chums. "I just love great-looking dirty Scots. Not so enamoured with the whiny-sounding American, though."

GEFORCE 8 TECH DEMOS
"That human-head demo is right spooky." Yeah, we know. We keep expecting its eyes to open and scare us shitless.

Want to tell us what's on your hard drive? Visit the forums at www.pczone.co.uk and let rip.



SAM & MAX

SEASON ONE

Available in Stores 31st August



Hairballs of Justice

CLOGGING CRIME'S UNSAVORY WINDPIPE

A FULL-SIZE PRINTED POSTER



- AN ALL-NEW SAM & MAX BEHIND THE SCENES VIDEO
- TRAILERS FOR ALL SIX EPISODES
- PREVIOUSLY UNRELEASED CHARACTER BIOS
- LOADS OF CONCEPT ARTWORK
- DESKTOP WALLPAPERS
- AN MP3 SOUNDTRACK SAMPLER

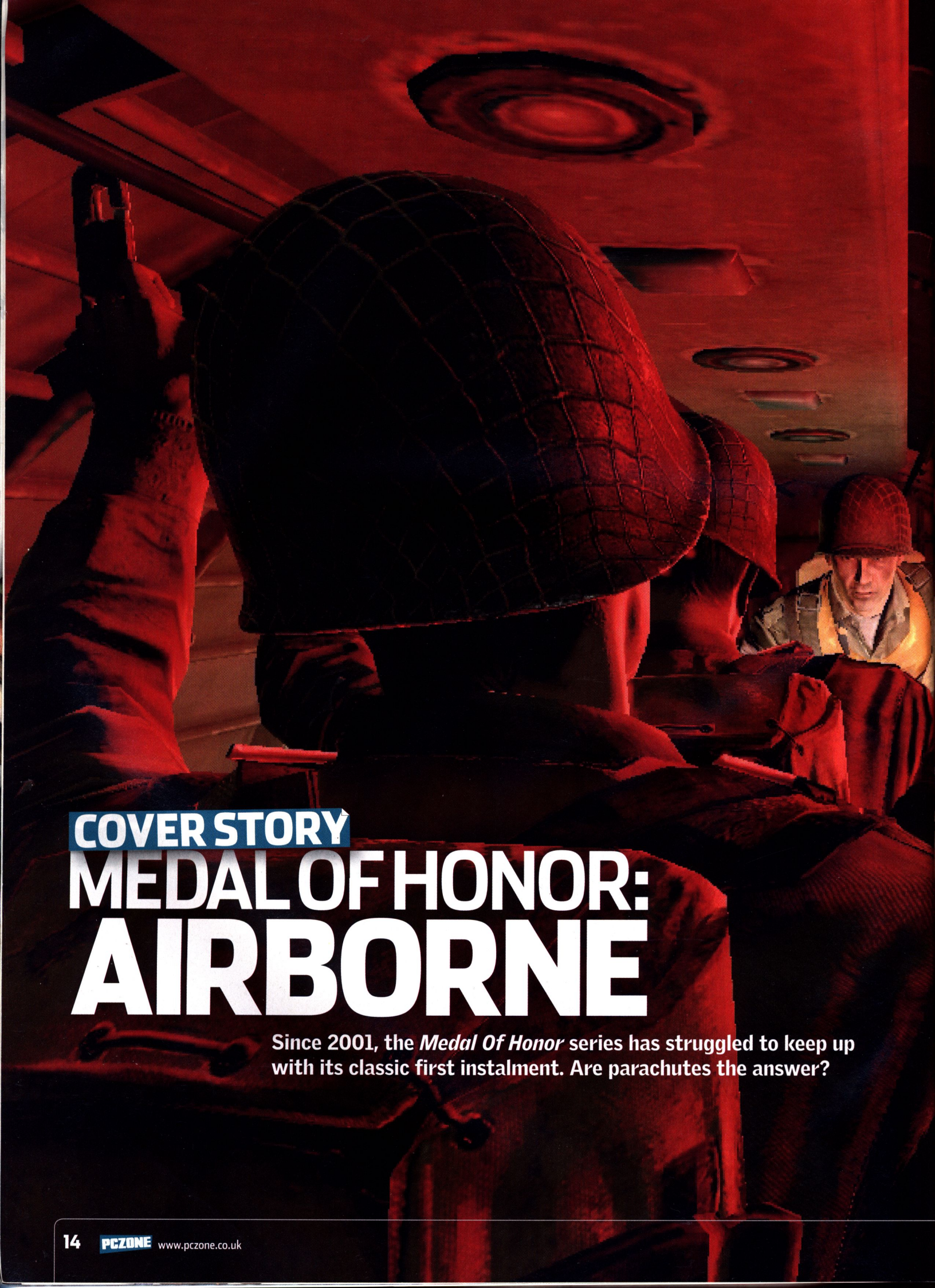
SAM&MAX EPISODE 5: REALITY 2.0:
"This is an adventure game for anyone who loves adventure games, anyone who loves to laugh, and anyone who loves animals represented as gun-toting soziopaths."

"SAM & MAX: EPISODE 1 – CULTURE SHOCK"
EUROGAMER 9/10

RECOMMENDED PCZONE

JoWooD · THE ADVENTURE COMPANY · telltale games www.telltalegames.com · GAMETAP ORIGINAL www.gametap.com · PC

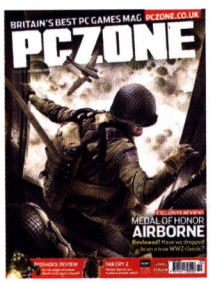
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COVER STORY

MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE

Since 2001, the *Medal Of Honor* series has struggled to keep up with its classic first instalment. Are parachutes the answer?



GETTING WHERE YOU'RE going can be a proper bind, especially when you're going to war. No-one knows this better than the *Medal Of Honor* series – they've built an entire franchise around the beach-landing scene of *Allied Assault*. We've come a long way, baby – from that grisly, death-sodden slog across a beach, to the height of airborne sophistication and elegance. Yessir, with *Medal Of Honor: Airborne*, you'll be drifting into the war zones of WWII like feathers on a velvet breeze, and the map is yours to land on, wherever takes your fancy. It's a fantastic idea and it sounds exciting – but did the boys at EA get it right?

PAGE 56



An apology

TWO ISSUES AGO, I called into question the awesomeness of a barbarian. In our *Age Of Conan: Hyborian Adventures* hands-on, I referred to the *Conan* franchise as "a greased-up homoerotic beast", and claimed that Conan himself "resides at the arse-end of the fantasy genre". This made some of you, understandably, very annoyed, and for that I am sorry.

That somebody so obviously ignorant to the early works of Ronald E Howard could so callously and flippantly slander a character who not only created the sword & sorcery genre, but went on to rule over California, is shameful. In light of a recent poll on www.pczone.co.uk, it was revealed that 62% of people believe him to be cool.

With this in mind, I ventured into the forums of the official Conan site (www.conan.com) and, in order to research away my ignorance and guilt, read with interest the threads titled: 'More proof of Conan's hairy chest' (Xuthal in the Dusk explains it clearly); 'Methods to build Conan-like strength and muscle' (you'll need "sandbags and other odd implements like logs and barrels"); and 'Music Conan would like today' (*You Really Got Me* by Van Halen). And yes, those were all genuine discussions.

Now, armed with this deeper understanding of Conan the Cimmerian, I can look back at *Age Of Conan: Hyborian Adventures* with an unbiased eye. Hmmm. Give me a second. Yes, the controls still felt a bit clunky. Sorry.

Steve Hogarty

Steve Hogarty, section editor

MY GOD, IT'S FULL OF STARCRAFT!

StarCraft II associate producer Tony Hsu shoots the breeze with *ZONE* on all things Zergling-related

What is it that made the Koreans so mad-keen on *StarCraft*?
"Well, they took the game to a totally different level, one that I don't think anybody really expected. They were able to micro-manage everything, and do crazy stunts with units that nobody ever thought could be done. I think the game allowed for a lot of that, and it combined with the factions being really diverse, the timing of the release and the storyline. It was just a mix of those things and it worked its way up."

But seeing as *StarCraft* was released ten years ago, how are you making sure that new people 'get it'?
"That's one of the bigger challenges we have with *StarCraft II* – we have to appeal to the hardcore players, especially in Korea. So it's one of those 'easy to play, hard to master' mentalities. There are a few things that we allow to be automated, however. For instance, one of the new abilities is a charge ability for the zealots – where they automatically work by themselves, upgrade themselves and charge into the enemy. So we've simplified some things, while allowing for new units to bring in other levels of complexity. It's been a balancing act, going back and forth, and that's one of the biggest reasons why we have to test it all the way. We have to make sure that it's fun to play, but also appealing for all different levels of players."


"Bzzz, just a little laser for ya."

It must be hard to do a sequel to something people already know so well...
"Even details in our trailers get critiqued. At the beginning of one, a Terran dropship targets in some marines – and in no time on our battle.net forums, we had four threads discussing how that was going to affect the new game..."

And what about major gameplay changes? Can you tell us about the kind of stuff you've brought in for the sequel?
"I think it's the stuff brought in by our new units, and the warp-in is a great example of how our mechanics have really advanced – for the Protoss. You can warp guys in from Phase Prisms, which are these mobile tower platforms which fly around and they're also transport. And anywhere that's powered, you can warp in guys through its gateway. It opens up new tactics, you can go behind someone's base, power it up and then warp in a whole army."

It's refreshing to see a game that isn't ashamed to be hardcore...
"Absolutely. A lot of RTS games you see on the market are watered down, they make it easier for gamers to play. But I think we can entertain everyone at the same time, that's what we're trying to do. It is possible! That's what got everybody into the RTS genre in the first place..."

STOP PRESS!

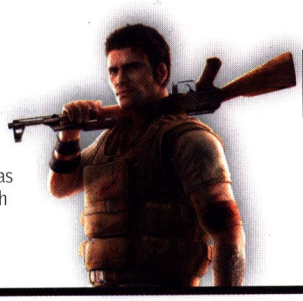
LOVE THE GLOCK
They is a new 'mystery shooter' game, and it am come to PC in the 2008. It'll make you 'love your weapons'. You heard it here first.

HEROES GAME
Enjoying the *Heroes* TV show? Well then you'll like the game won't you? You like games! Everybody loves games. This one's out in 2008.

LOST GAME
The *Lost* TV show is popular, so surely a game of it would also be popular. A *Lost* hat – that would be popular too. Coming in 2008!

20 Far Cry 2

Not so much *Out Of Africa*, as into Africa with a very big gun.



40 F.E.A.R. sequel

Alma is back. She's being bickered over by publishers. And she's still not happy...



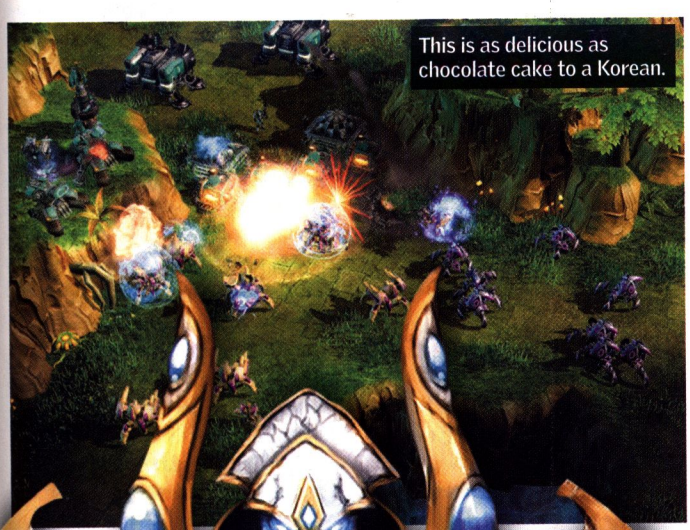
44 Fallout 3

The next great irradiated hope for role-playing put under the microscope.





Holding hands with lasers, that's the Protoss way.



This is as delicious as chocolate cake to a Korean.





Hair of the dog

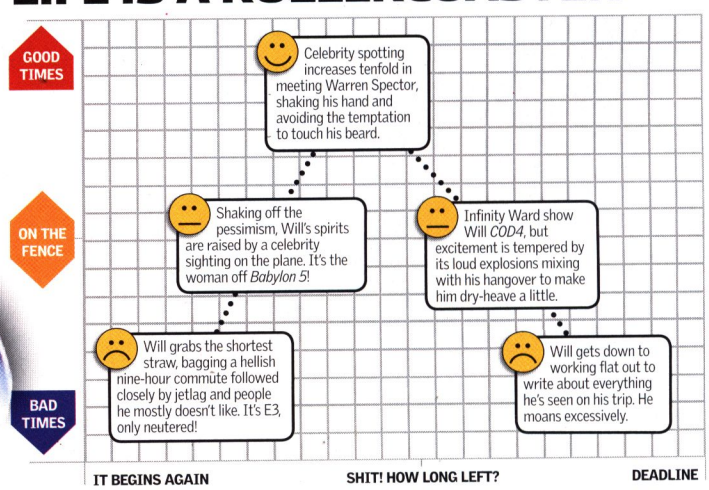
Season two of *Sam & Max* on the way

TOUCHING DOWN IN October will be the second season of episodes of every right-minded gamer's favourite animal crime-fighting twosome. The games promise to be less rigid and introduce a ton of new characters and locations (such as Stinky's Diner, shown above).

"In season one we said we'd use certain areas and that was it," explains Dan Connor. "In season two, locations are going to be a lot more deeply integrated, making more sense as to why you're actually there. It's an evolution in our thinking, we know what the season needs to do now, what it has to accomplish over the arc of the season. We're not going from episode to episode so much anymore."

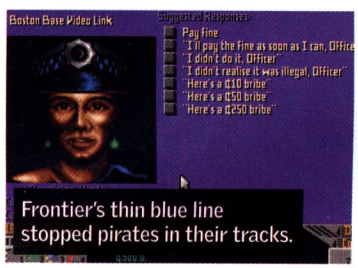
STUFF **James Cameron's forthcoming (and long-awaited) return to the director's chair with *Avatar* is getting the full-on 'hopefully not shit' game treatment. The story of an ex-marine with his mind trapped in an alien body on a strange, new alien world holds a lot of promise – and having shown their cinematic prowess with *King Kong*, Ubisoft are a decent enough bunch to be holding the reins of this one. Let's all join hands and make a big circle of hope.**

LIFE IS A ROLLERCOASTER



PROTECT AND SERVE

Squaring up to copy protection in PC games. *Pavel Barter* isn't wearing the right shoes and he's not getting in...



Frontier's thin blue line stopped pirates in their tracks.



Reporter
Pavel Barter

ALWAYS USE PROTECTION. Whether you're making a PC game or the monster with two backs, it's a wise creed. For gamers, however, 'protection' presents images of convoluted codes, online subscriptions and idiotic orders to restart your PC before the game can begin. At worse, protection is a short cut to digital STDs: malware, spyware, and more blue-screening than an XXX shop in Soho.

Is copy protection in PC games for the greater good of mankind, or is it akin to carrying a TV aerial around a park during a thunderstorm? Game creators are clear where they stand.

"I've always liked the idea of creative, nasty, deliberately destructive copy protection," smirks Jon Hare, designer behind the fabled *Sensible Soccer* franchise. "For example, injecting disabling viruses into pirate's machines, slow degradation of pirated games so they're unplayable after some time, or disabling the ability to save progress in the game if the copy is pirated."

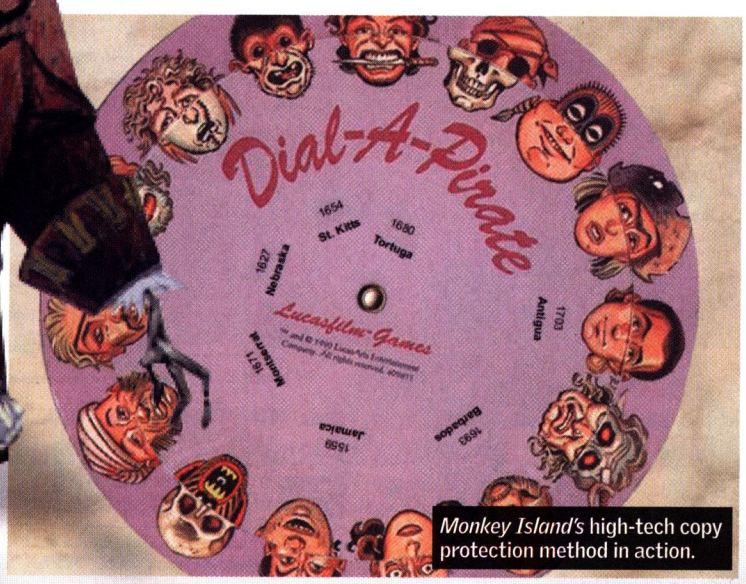
These days, the games industry is all a fluster about digital thievery. Understandably so. Where once pirates stole from kings, they're now more likely to announce: "Arrrr, I just plundered 20 copies of *Miss Congeniality 2*." Hardly the toughest kids on the block, then, and when their antics start to effect our own enjoyment of games, it's probably time to start making them walk the plank. But what happens when copy protection starts causing problems for legit gamers?

MONKEY DO

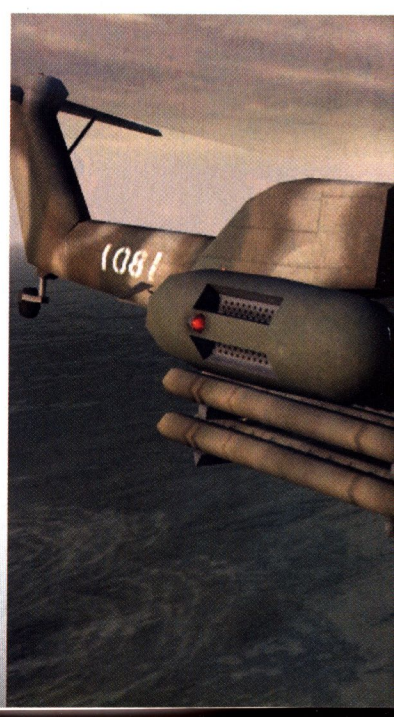
There was a time when life was far more simple, says Ron Gilbert, creator of LucasArts classics like *The Secret Of Monkey Island*. "Back in the olden days, we didn't have high-tech copy protection solutions, so we had to resort to low-tech ideas. Because the copy protection wasn't hidden – as it is today – it gave us the chance to be a little creative." Creative and fun. Ye olde PC games politely asked you to refer to the manual in order to prove your credentials. In *Frontier: Elite II*, sci-fi cops asked the player to: "Please enter the first letter of word X, row Y on page Z." An incorrect entry booted the player out, but at least it played an integral part of the game.

Manuals were like Bibles in those days. *King's Quest III* demanded spell recipes, *Conquests Of Camelot* looked for answers to riddles, while *Leisure Suit Larry* asked you to seek out ladies' numbers. Gilbert continues: "In *Maniac Mansion*, there's a security door that leads to the second floor of the mansion and it requires a code. The player looked up the code in a small book that accompanied the game. The book was themed like a real security codebook. If you got the code wrong, it triggered an alarm and the nuclear reactor started to melt down. If you didn't get it right after a few minutes, the mansion would blow up and the game would be over."

Gilbert's invention worked a treat – even if you didn't have the codebook, you could still play a quarter of the game, so it functioned perfectly as a demo. *The Secret Of Monkey Island* sold with a cardboard rotating pirate wheel that



Monkey Island's high-tech copy protection method in action.





revealed numbers when spun, which in turn validated the player. "It's hard to imagine these systems working today. If you created *Monkey Island's* code wheel, someone would build a Flash version and put it online within ten minutes of the game's release," says Gilbert.

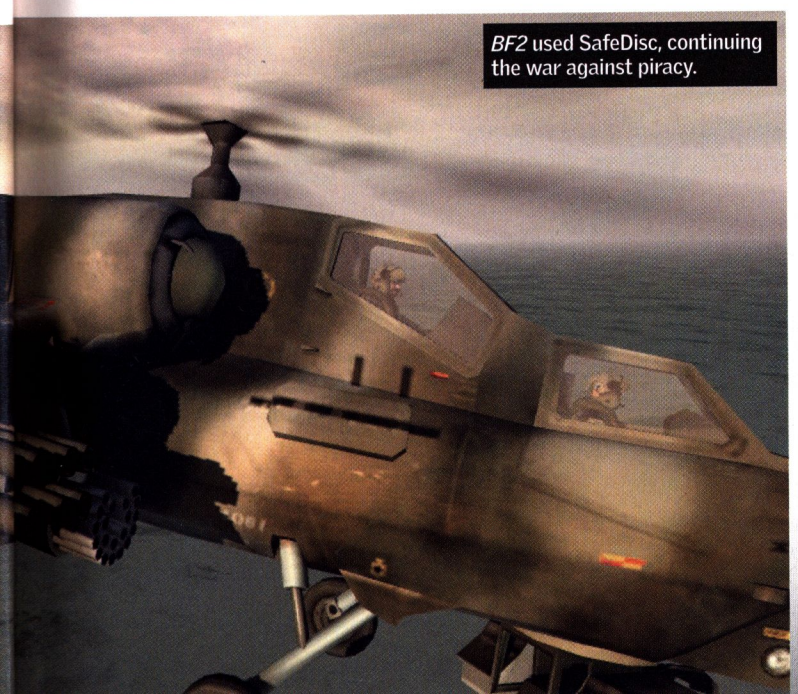
LOCK DOWN?

Not all early copy protection was so lovable. Copy protection mechanism Lenslok was meant to reveal codes displayed on the monitor, but on some screens this fancy piece of plastic just revealed an abstract mush. Regardless, peripheral protection didn't last long – a few years later, PC games began demanding registration keys. "I guess copy protection was so abused in the past that a lot of the big-hitting companies decided to toughen up and others followed suit," says Jon Hare. "I'm sure EA wouldn't be as casual about a 90% piracy rate as we used to be. And who can blame them?"

Games now employ Fort Knox-levels of security. SafeDisc, which provides basic copy protection for games like *Battlefield 2*, now features an advanced software development kit. Dan Gamble, SafeDisc PR, explains: "The game code becomes aware of a copy and changes its behaviour. Imagine a copied game that allows you to get to level three, but then removes the exit door to level four. Or a copied game that decides that you can never replenish your character's energy – or one that would remove all the best weapons from use..."

Bloody annoying, but a wet raspberry in the face of pirates who thought they'd got away with it. However, other modern forms of copy protection are massive bones of contention. Take StarForce, security software behind games like *LMA Manager 2007*. StarForce drivers have been accused of causing system instability, computer crashes and probably the war in Iraq too. Does StarForce's trail of lawsuit complaints and furious gamers suggest that the Eye of Sauron is on copy protection providers?

"If you created *MI's* code wheel today, someone would put a Flash version online within ten minutes"
Ron Gilbert, creator of *The Secret Of Monkey Island*


BF2 used SafeDisc, continuing the war against piracy.

FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE

Dmitry Guseff, PR manager in StarForce's Moscow base, argues not. "Lots of programs run on computers (at the same time), and many of them may interact with protection, like optical drive emulators or optical disc burning programs. StarForce achieved Microsoft Certified Partner Level and also became Intel Software Partner. Our products also smoothly passed Windows Vista 32/64-bit compatibility testing programs. Bottom line, we're just like any other well-reputed software protection company and as such consider these allegations false."

In the face of controversy, and in an effort to seek new ways to protect their products, some games publishers are forgoing draconian copy protection in favour of luring legit customers with free updates. Meanwhile, content delivery systems like Steam have been successful in reducing piracy, although they're not without criticism – one dodgy server or a botched code is all it takes to ruin your jollies.

Short of shop owners threatening you with a shotgun at point of purchase, copy protection isn't going away any time soon. These days, it's just another necessary evil, reckons Ron Gilbert.

"My view of copy protection in games (and music and movies) is that it should be there as a subtle reminder that, 'Hey! Don't give this away! Someone worked hard on it and needs to feed their family'. However, it should be breakable so I can use the game/movie/music the way I need to. I see it much like a lock on a front door. It isn't keeping anyone out of the house if they really want to get in, but it's a reminder that if you don't live here, you're not welcome." PCZ

Is there anything you want Pavel Barter to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk
✉ pavel barter, pc zone, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

Karma police

Cracking the world of copy protection



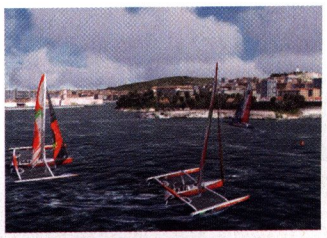
SafeDisc

Creator: Macrovision Corp
Games: *BF2*, *Quake 4*, *The Movies*
Powers: "SafeDisc ensures games only run with an original CD/DVD," explains Dan Gamble. "It's transparent to the end-user and the gaming experience is unaffected."



SecuROM

Creator: Sony DADC
Games: *F.E.A.R.*, *STALKER*, *Warcraft III*
Powers: Prevents hacks from making 1:1 CD-R copies with an "uncopyable electronic keycode" and a "transparent process to original disc users," according to securom.com.



StarForce

Creator: StarForce Technologies
Games: *King Kong*, *POP: TTT*
Powers: "In SF Frontline 4.7, you can make a copy of the game and play it without the disc," says Dmitry Guseff. "This means less scratches and a longer lifetime for your game."

AFRICA-BOUND...
FAR CRY 2

ETA 2008

Hurry, *Steve Hogarty* – the sequel to the PC's greatest shooter is waiting there for you...

DEVELOPER Ubisoft Montreal **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **WEBSITE** www.ubisoft.com

THE LOWDOWN

- Interesting social-interaction stuff ✓
- Huge, free-roaming African gameworld ✓
- Coupled with *Far Cry*... ✓
- ...equals something that can't be less than fantastic ✓
- Not being made by Crytek ✗

AFTER A HARD day spent chasing antelope around the Serengeti, one craves – as the cheetah in those Schweppes ads would say – the 'particular effervescence' only to be found in a sequel to one of the PC's best shooters. And here it is: *Far Cry 2* – a pure tonic. It's less jungle, more elephant. Less beach, more gazelle. Less shooting, more *socialising*.

In case you've just fallen out of your chair, we should mention that what we're dealing with here is a classic case of developers and publishers divorcing one another, each gaining custody of various bits and bobs to do with the copyright, licence and IP. It's rather confusing, but basically, Crytek, *Far Cry*'s creators, took the original game's code-guts and ran off to make the much-anticipated jungle shooter *Crysis*, while Ubisoft were left with the floppy, hollow skin – the right to use the words 'Far' and 'Cry' on the box.


"Right then – who left the barbecue unattended?"

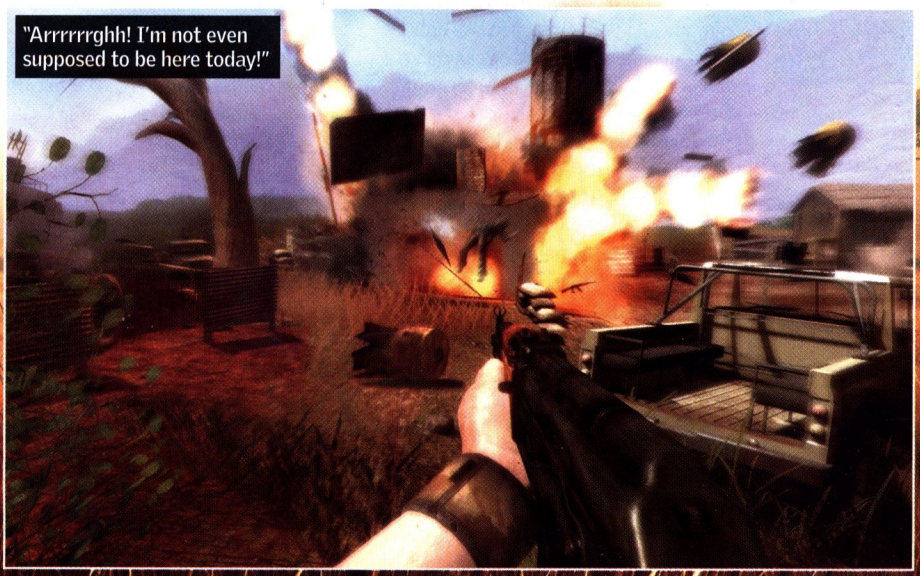
BUDDY SYSTEM

So what have they got to back up the eye-catching title? Well, quite a lot, as it happens. Ubisoft Montreal are taking charge, having had first-hand experience developing the console versions of *Far Cry*, and what we've been shown of the new game is a strong indication that they're not going to fudge it. They've been working on this since before *Far Cry: Instincts*, in fact, and as such you'll find that Jack Carver's silly feral superpowers are thankfully absent, as is Jack Carver himself. This is a complete departure from *Far Cry*'s mutants and mercenaries.

Where the game's set is even more interesting – an unrestricted 50sq km chunk of Africa. And no, we don't mean 'unrestricted' in the sense of *Far Cry*'s supposedly 'open' jungles, which were implicitly linear affairs; it's genuinely unrestricted, enabling players to roam freely through the nameless African state. As a consequence, the story itself will be dynamically and procedurally generated. The actions of key characters and the placement of plot points are determined by the game as you play – maybe not quite to the extent that each player will have a drastically different storyline to follow, but perhaps just enough for you to really feel like you're a part of some African tale.

In a roundabout way, it's comparable to *Boiling Point*. Your ultimate goal is to find and kill one man – a bad man – and to do so you've got to manipulate two factions, playing them off against each another, accepting missions and building up a reputation for yourself as you go.

Your allies, AI-controlled both physically and in a narrative sense, are called into play when the storyline needs them. These AI 'buddies', as they're being called, are important in some way that's yet to be properly revealed, but they'll be the ones getting involved in *Far Cry 2*'s various storyline events. How these events happen, who's involved in them and how they resolve themselves will be determined either by chance or by the actions of the player. It's this ambitious, contextual artificial intelligence that'll


"Arrrrrrghh! I'm not even supposed to be here today!"


"I, the world's tallest man, am come for your souls!"

FAR CRY

Far Cry
Developed by Crytek, published by Ubisoft. Smiles all round; a great game is born.

2004

Far Cry: Instincts
Ubisoft Montreal's console adaptation of *Far Cry* doesn't quite meet PC standards.

2006

Crysis
Crytek move on to their next project, losing the *Far Cry* name, but not the *Far Cry* spirit.

2006

Far Cry 2
Now being made by Ubisoft Montreal, can it fill the first *Far Cry*'s giant clown-type shoes?

2008

drive the game – and there we were thinking Ubisoft would simply knock out a paint-by-numbers shooter.

SMART GAZELLES

The AI even filters down to the game's wildlife. Day/night cycles and a needs-driven AI system (similar to *STALKER*'s A-Life) allow for gazelles – oh yes, gazelles – that wander to certain places if they're thirsty or sleepy. The same logic applies to humans too, with every NPC needing to fulfil their Rest, Social and Duty needs. Specific points in the world, such as a bed, another NPC or a patrol path enable them to do this. So they'll find somewhere to sleep, wake up, chat with their mates and then go on patrol, all according to their needs at any given time.

These need-fulfilling points in the world, called SmartTerrain Points, are active only at certain times too. At night, for example, you won't have a guard wandering off two miles into the wilderness to find someone for a quick chinwag. Likewise,

Jack Carver's silly superpowers are absent, as is Jack Carver himself



Storm in a teacup

We bless the rains down in Africa



You can't have a 50sq km world without a day/night cycle, and you can't have a day/night cycle without some sort of weather system behind it. That's basically the law. *Far Cry 2*'s weather effects look great – particularly those involved in creating storms. Storm clouds gather on the horizon, before the wind picks up and everything goes a bit gale-force. Trees are swept to one side by the buffeting winds, and loads of leaves flutter through the air. When the whole thing's over, the trees are slightly barer than they were to begin with. Meteorologists and Beaufort-scale enthusiasts, your game has arrived.

guards will stick more rigidly to a patrol route at night, generally staying close to their camp. It's more likely you'll find sleeping guards during the wee hours than under the midday sun. It means the world and its inhabitants, man and beast, will be more unpredictable. Coming across an enemy base and deciding how to tackle it will be more than just a matter of observing patrol routes and timing your shots; likewise, it won't be a simple matter of learning a particular NPC's set schedule. What part gazelles play in all this is anybody's guess, but a game with sleepy gazelles is all right in our books.

SAVANNAH GOOD TIME

Ubisoft have made the bold claim that *Far Cry 2* will contain every type of African terrain you could possibly think of, or your money back. We're talking grassless, grassy, partially grassy and jungles, at the very least. Yes, that's right – jungles, the things which made *Far Cry* so impressive, have been relegated to a mere subsection of the gameworld.

Not that they've decreased in splendour – they've been built in such a way as to be more conducive to thrilling shootouts. They'll be as dense as in the original game, but situated in clumps, thus creating natural pathways through them. Not necessarily in a restrictive way either, but more to enable the player to spot enemies through trees and react by hiding – or by peppering the foliage with a few high-velocity rounds until something bleeds. Just to prove that these jungles aren't funnelling you down a predetermined path, Ubisoft have included a tree-toppling machete in your inventory, giving you the option to make your own way through the vegetation.

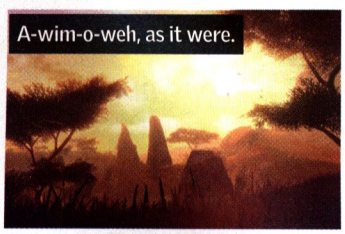
Outside of these jungles, the vast, open arenas allow for a different sort of playing style. Draw distances touch the horizon, so long-range sniping becomes the preferred method of death-dealing, while Ubisoft promise at least one high-speed car chase across the dusty plains. Not much is known about the vehicles yet, but the screenshots confirm that *Far Cry*'s iconic hang-glider is definitely making a welcome appearance, along with what's swiftly becoming an FPS staple: jeeps. Possibly punchable ones. We're hoping planes and maybe even helicopters make the final cut – with a massive playing area, the only thing to hold it back would be the engine, which looks more than capable.

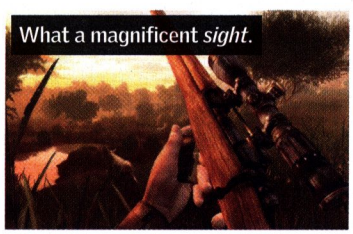
SOCIAL STUDIES

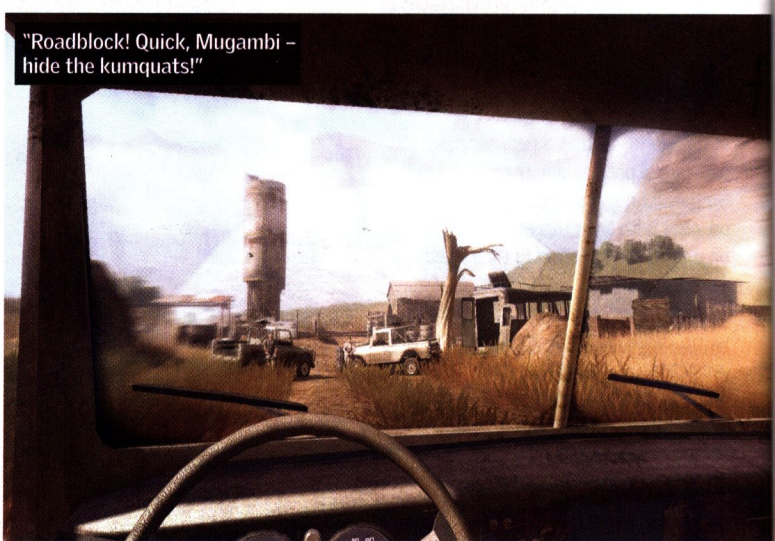
So that's *Far Cry 2*, then, a game that's shaping up to be so much more than just a name-dropping, licence-holding filler title – and, refreshingly, a game that's aimed squarely at the PC market. Those

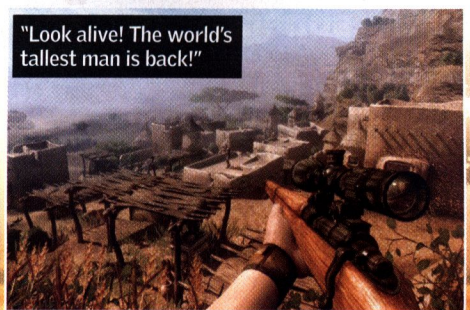
Jungles are built so as to be more conducive to thrilling shootouts













Burninating the countryside

How *Far Cry 2*'s crazy fire effects hint heavily at the inclusion of Molotov cocktails and flame-throwers in the game's arsenal. Well, we can speculate can't we?



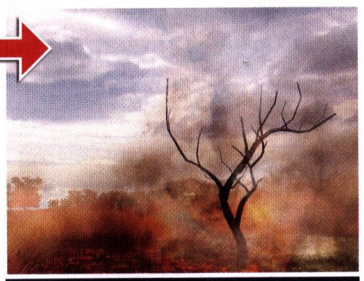
A tree. Hello, tree. You're all about the happy thoughts, right? Nothing can hurt you. It's not as if we'd start... Oh no! Is that a fire? We think it might be.



That's right, tree – the game engine has *fire*. And proper, spreadable fire too. You totally weren't expecting this. This is like *Beadle's About* for trees.



Ha ha – look at you now, tree. The fire's spreading upwards and outwards, and you're becoming a mere charcoal husk. We could draw pictures with you.



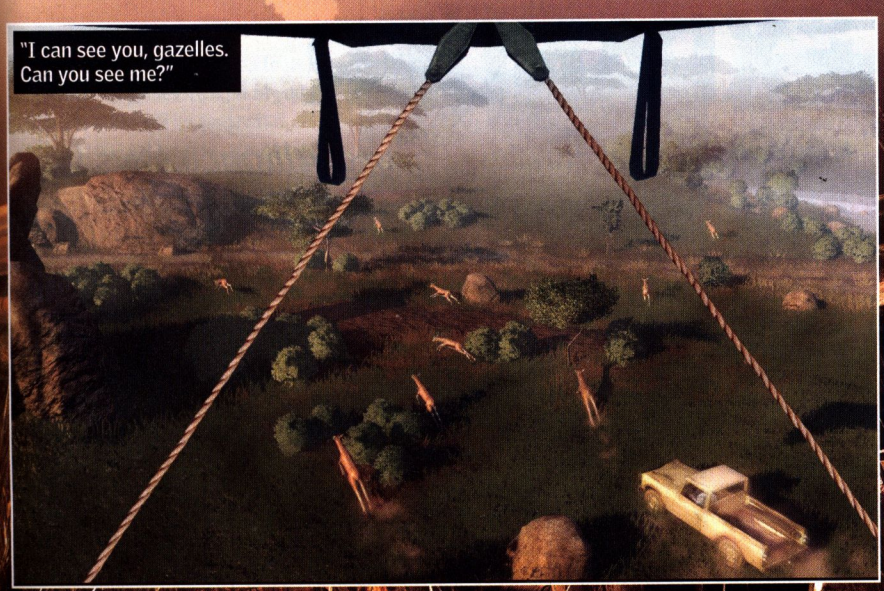
Now you barely look like a tree at all. We wouldn't like to climb you, that's for sure. Our hands would get all dirty, like when we read *Metro* on the bus.

in-house developers at Ubisoft seem pretty ambitious, with promises that *Far Cry 2* will put you in the most socially complex situations ever seen in a game. Exactly what kinds of situations these will turn out to be isn't clear yet, but the dynamic narrative and AI buddies will surely play an integral part. It's all intriguing stuff, and we'll let you know exactly what Ubisoft have got up their sleeves as soon as we find out.

This game may have less in common with *Far Cry* than *Crysis* does, but it's retaining that *Far Cry* feeling of being lost in an exotic world. Asking if Ubisoft Montreal are capable of carrying the weight of such a highly regarded PC shooter series is clearly unnecessary – they're taking the weight and running with it. Running to some really weird places we didn't expect them to run to. Man's natural ruthlessness, his deeply ingrained animal instinct versus his social nature, is what *Far Cry 2* hopes to explore. Which, if anything, is a bit more interesting than an icy jungle. PCZ



Ken Livingstone's war on 4x4s was getting *personal*.



"I can see you, gazelles. Can you see me?"

PCZONE CHARTS

ChartTrack

1	↑	WORLD OF WARCRAFT: BURNING CRUSADE	Issue 179 93%
2	NEW	GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2	Issue 184 80%
3	↓	COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS	Issue 180 85%
4	↓	THE SIMS 2: SEASONS	Issue 181 54%
5	—	HARRY POTTER & THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX	Issue 184 79%
6	↑	MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR	Issue 175 91%
7	↑	THE SIMS 2: PETS	Issue 176 72%
8	↑	STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL	Issue 179 85%
9	↓	THE SIMS 2	Issue 147 82%
10	↑	TOMB RAIDER: ANNIVERSARY	Issue 182 83%
11	↑	INTERNATIONAL CRICKET CAPTAIN III	Issue N/A N/A
12	↑	THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF THE SIMS	Issue 165 N/A
13	↑	LOTR ONLINE: SHADOWS OF ANGMAR	Issue 182 87%
14	↓	CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2007	Issue 175 69%
15	↓	LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION	Issue 184 66%
16	↑	THE SIMS 2: NIGHTLIFE	Issue 161 58%
17	NEW	SHIP SIMULATOR 2008	Issue 185 64%
18	↑	BATTLEFIELD 2142	Issue 174 86%
19	NEW	THE SIMS 2: UNIVERSITY	Issue 153 57%
20	↓	THE SIMS 2: OPEN FOR BUSINESS	Issue 166 72%



HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

We were really hoping Harry would turn out to be a delusional old man at the end of the last book.



LOST PLANET: EXTREME CONDITION

When we lose a planet, we put a sign up in Tesco asking if anybody's seen it. Usually it turns up.



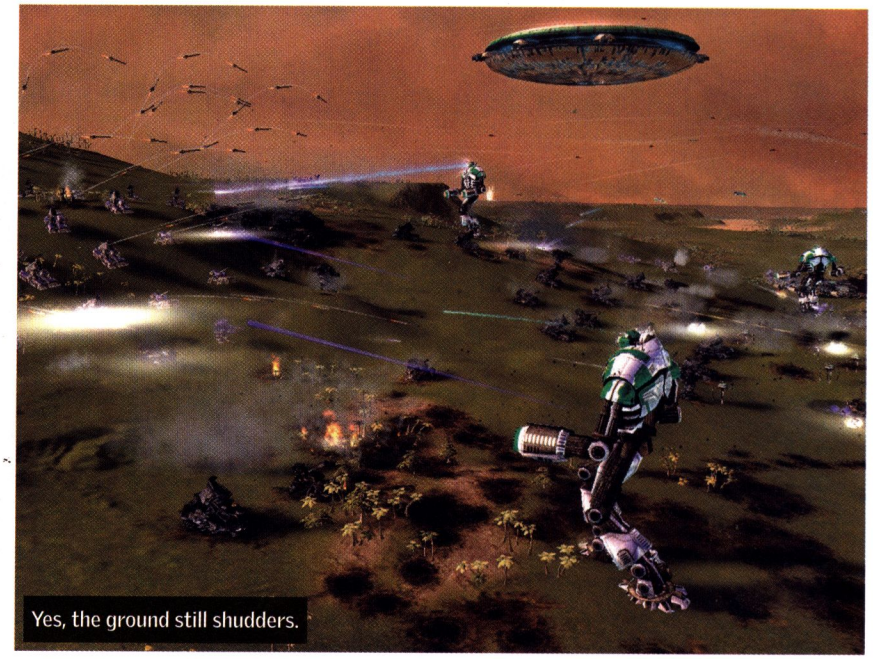
SHIP SIMULATOR 2008

The developers actually sent us packets of Fisherman's Friend to "enhance the sea-faring experience". It worked, too.

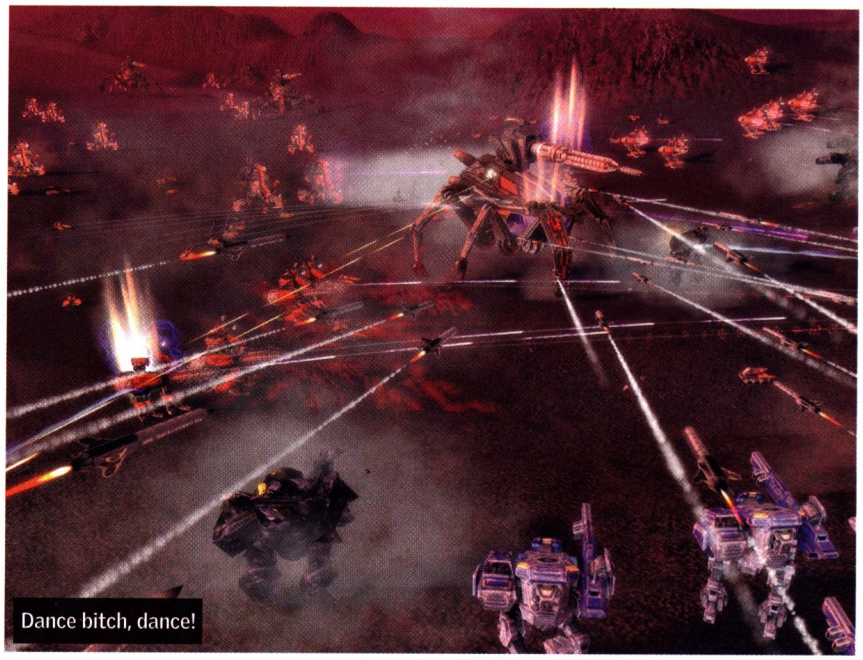


BATTLEFIELD 2142

If the irreversible deterioration of the planet's health has done one good thing, it's this. In your face, Earth.



Yes, the ground still shudders.



Dance bitch, dance!

SUPREME EXPANDER

Supreme Commander: Forged Alliance says hello

www.supremecommander.com | ETA: November

ANOTHER BLAST FROM the shotgun of Gas Powered Games is launching a ***Supreme Commander*** **expansion at our unprotected torsos, threatening to tear us in half with its real-time strategy greatness.**

Supreme Commander: Forged Alliance is a standalone expansion, arriving a mere human pregnancy after the original game came out (that's nine months, guys). It's adding a new faction, the Seraphim, who are forcing the remaining three factions to forge an unwilling alliance. As if there's any other *kind* of alliance these days.

110 new units are being rolled out, along with a new campaign and a few key graphical tweaks that will make the whole engine glitter again. These units include new experimental weapons for each of the factions – huge amphibious battletanks, carpet-bombing airships as big as you like and other tactically clever units to smooth over any gaps in your army.

We're fairly confident that *Forged Alliance* will be an essential add-on for fans of Chris Taylor's excellent RTS, and come November we'll know exactly how enticing it'll be for new players too.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT:

The man who draws City Of Heroes



MATT MILLER – LEAD DESIGNER AT CRYPTIC STUDIOS

The hugely popular superhero MMORPG is approaching its milestone tenth update, and Matt Miller is the man who can paint the future, who envisions what will become. What does he have in store for *Issue 10: Invasion*?

What's so special about this new update, *Issue 10: Invasion*?

"The special thing about *Issue 10* is that it's one of the first times since *City Of Villains* where we've actually expanded the storyline for the players. We're bringing back the Rikti, the alien menace, and that's a major thread. A lot of the missions in the run-up to this issue have involved the possible re-emergence of the Rikti, and now we're actually bringing that to fruition through a series of events."

So what kind of features will the new issue implement?

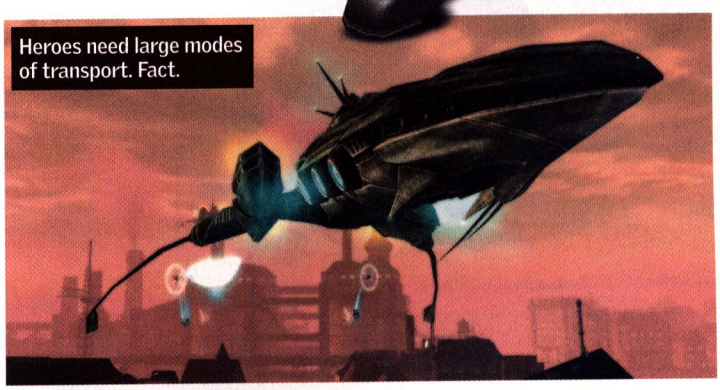
"We've revamped the Rikti crash site zone, which is our high-level zone. It's been completely reworked to show the Rikti as a global threat now. Heroes and Villains are being recruited by an organisation called Vanguard to come and fight the Rikti, and that opens up a whole load of new mission content. Players will be figuring out what's going on with the Rikti, and tying up some loose ends from the Rikti war which took place before the game had launched. We've also got the invasion event itself taking place across all servers and all zones for a couple of weeks after the issue comes out. The Rikti will be attacking the city directly, dropping bombs from dropships as well as teleporting in troops to disrupt groups of players."

How does it all tie into the comic-book series?

"Sean Fish, one of our writers at Cryptic Studios and a major influence on *City Of Heroes*, was writing the last two issues of the comic. When we heard the comic-book was ending, we decided that him and I would write the final issue. So the last two issues, issues 19 and 20, tie directly in to *Issue 10* of the game in terms of NPCs and storylines. We're passing the torch from the comic-book to the game at this point, ending it in a 'further adventures can be found by playing the game' kind of way."

How do you keep and attract players in general?

"We keep players by constantly giving them what they want. We did a poll recently asking our players what power-sets we should be working on, and now we're working on getting those power-sets into the next issue. As for attracting new players, we do that through having a low barrier to entry. When you load up our game, the very first experience you have is playing with the most advanced costume-creator of any MMO, the initial choices are practically limitless as to what your character can look like. No other MMO does that – they usually make you work for how you look. So you get this initial freedom and then when you start playing, it's really fun. It's fast-paced and you don't start off fighting rats for five hours – you start off fighting street crime like a superhero, right off the bat."



Heroes need large modes of transport. Fact.

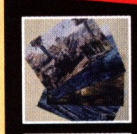
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Tat, you have committed the act of being cool merchandise given to us by publishers of games. In light of your guilty plea, we will be somewhat lenient in our sentencing. Jury, have you come to a decision? What's that? All of the following tat can be found on eBay under the 'PCZoners' tag? Yes, but what about the sentencing? You sentence the readers to bid on the tat?! What is this madness? *You're sentencing me to shut up*?! I will hold you in contempt of court! Grr!

Buy our tat at www.ebay.co.uk All proceeds go to charity. Honest. www.entertainmentsoftwarecharity.org

THIS MONTH'S TAT



FALLOUT 3 POSTCARDS
Wish you were here! In apocalyptic hell!



FALLOUT 3 T-SHIRT
Medium-sized and purloined from Bethesda themselves.



TABULA RASA CAP
You'll be the streetest dude in space with this badass hat.



GAMECOCK T-SHIRT
Large-sized shirt from the fun-loving chaps at Gamecock. A bit rude!

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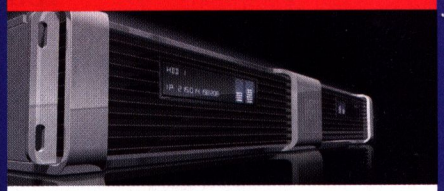
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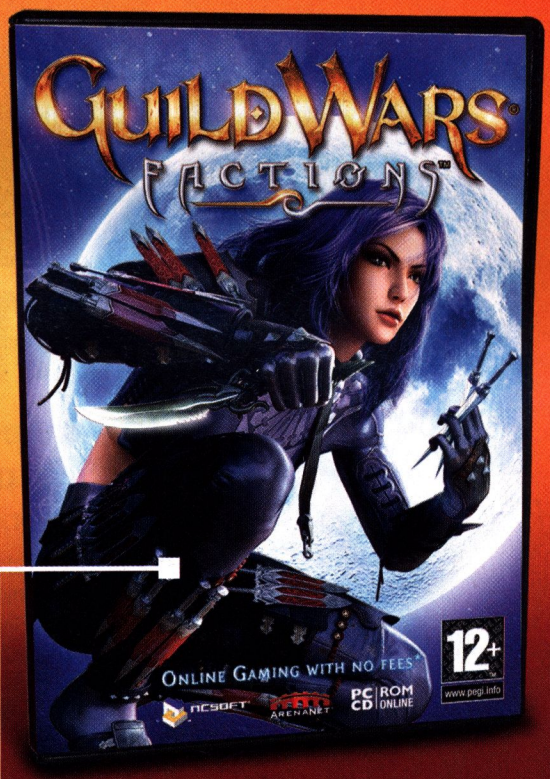
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GUILD WARS: PROPHECIES

A stunning fantasy online role-playing game that's easy to pick up and play, but also has huge depth and immersion.

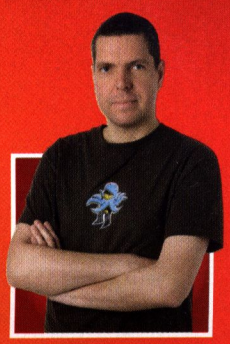
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GUILD WARS: FACTIONS

The second unmissable chapter of the Guild Wars MMO features a beautiful new Oriental setting and new characters such as the assassin.

RECOMMENDED • RECOMMENDED PC ZONE



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Jamie

Jamie Sefton
Editor

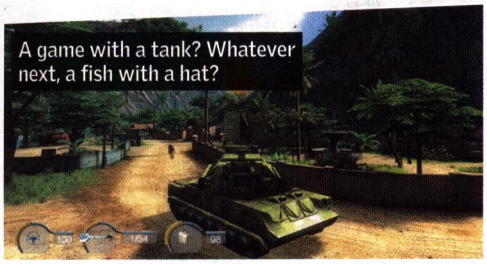


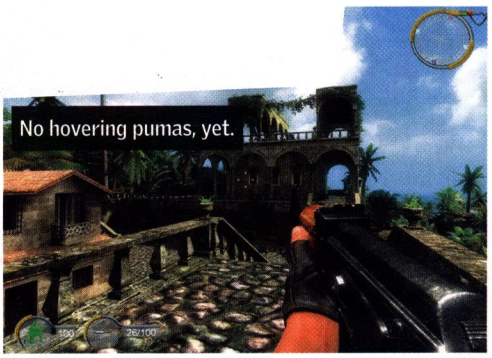
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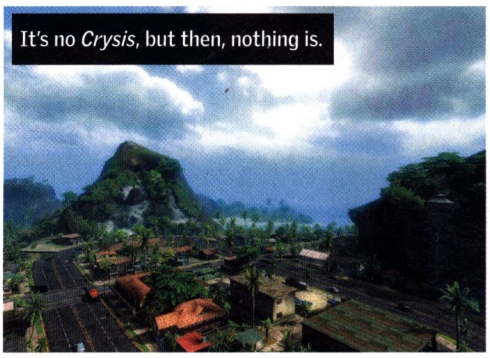
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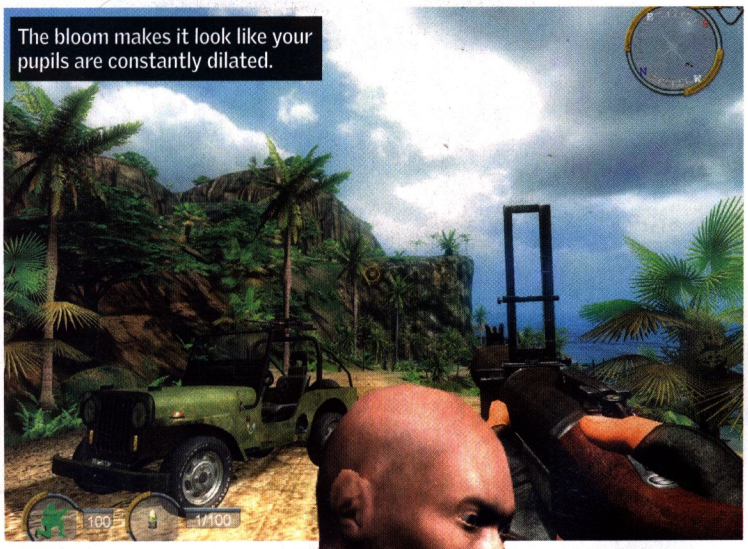
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A game with a tank? Whatever next, a fish with a hat?


No hovering pumas, yet.


It's no *Crysis*, but then, nothing is.


The bloom makes it look like your pupils are constantly dilated.


The very first in-game AI pervert?

WHITE GOLD

Steve Hogarty peers into Deep Shadows' two new projects – first up, their very own tropical shooter

www.deep-shadows.com | ETA: Q1 2008

IF YOU PLAYED *Boiling Point* **and didn't find yourself outwardly ROFLing at the absurd number of bugs the game was drowning in, then maybe you saw the potential Deep Shadows' free-roaming Columbian RPG had hidden in its floating-puma infested jungles.**

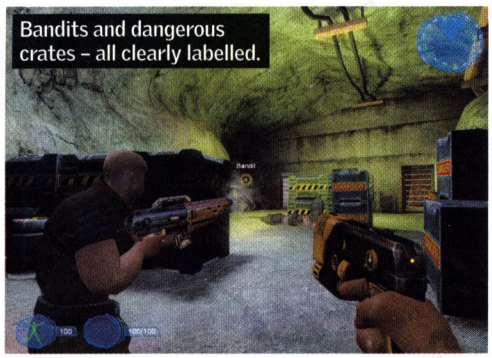
Between the regular crashes, exploding police stations and enigmatic, jittery wildlife, *Boiling Point* was a deceptively deep and engaging title, with a massive playing area and scope for frequently-interrupted enjoyment. It's this glimmer of potential, that pointed edge of the sword Atari so cruelly dulled by forcing the game out the door before it had time to fully gestate, that we might be seeing in *White Gold*. This is *Boiling Point 2* in all but name.

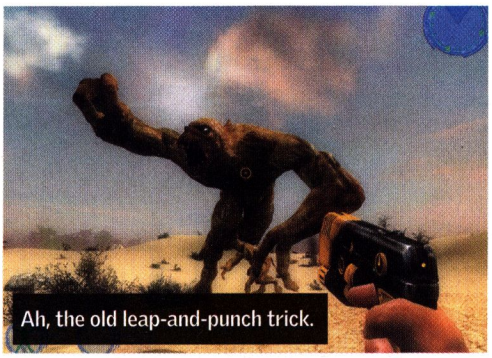
ANOTHER LINE, DEAR?

You're a man, shooting people on a Carribean island and getting around using your feet and a variety of vehicles. Think *Just Cause* but from a first-person perspective. The storyline will see you very much engrossed in the ugly dealings of local mobs, gangs and corrupt authorities, all of them chugging down copious amounts of the titular white stuff, no doubt. Deep Shadows have claimed to be in possession of a map totalling somewhere in the region of 140sq km (wait, what?), some of it being underwater too, with the Ukrainian developers citing one particular mission asking you to swim down to a shipwreck (we're guessing to retrieve some drugs).

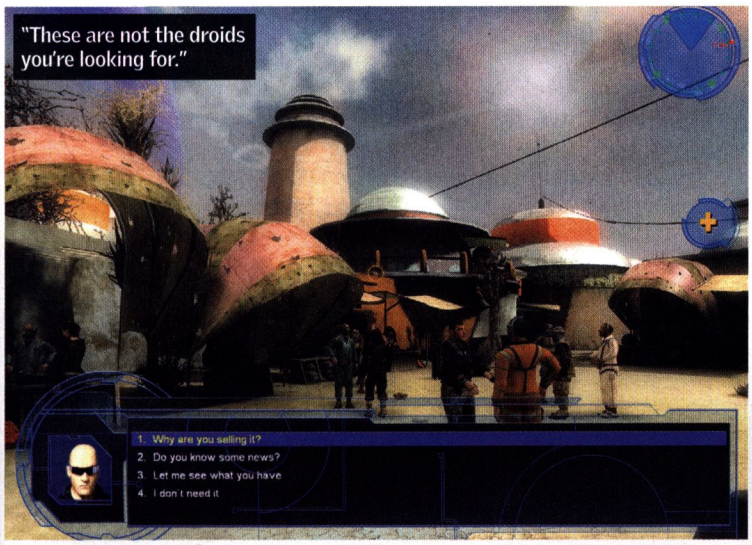
It could be good, because it could be what *Boiling Point* should have been, and *Boiling Point* should have been good. It's open-ended, in a *Grand Theft Auto* way rather than an *Oblivion* way, but it shares the kooky RPG aspects of its predecessor. You can take drugs and develop an addiction (hooray!). Likewise, you can get drunk on some top-notch Rum and stumble about the island annoying the natives. You can talk to anybody you meet – whether or not they have anything interesting to say – level-up abilities such as lock-picking, shooting, hacking, out-drinking the locals and skinning animals, and form allegiances with stereotyped factions. Eating, drinking and sleeping are as necessary here as they are in reality, perhaps even more so; forget to do one and your skills as a man-killing machine start to become a little frayed.

But get this, as Deep Shadows began happily packing *White Gold* away before they left our office, they mentioned a particular line of side-missions the game will host. The 'mystery files' as they put it, will have you hunting down rare animals and unexplained phenomenon. One of these cases involves a man riding around on a shark. Forgive us for taking one tiny aspect of your game and blowing it out of proportion, Deep Shadows, but a man riding a shark? That's cool. That's a classic right there...


Bandits and dangerous crates – all clearly labelled.


Ah, the old leap-and-punch trick.


"I am a mech now, deal with it."




And now we're in space – in the same game!

THE PRECURSORS

And for their next trick, Deep Shadows' genre-blending sci-fi adventure – what can't they do?

www.deep-shadows.com | ETA: Q2 2008

DEEP SHADOWS' SECOND project is one that was announced almost two years ago. Made using the same engine as *White Gold* (even so far as to share an inventory screen layout), *The Precursors* is attempting to dance the dangerous trans-genre tango: a sci-fi first-person shooter to begin with, set across several open environments, but turning into a space 'em up with *Freelancer*-inspired sections, in which you take part in full-on spaceship warfare with lasers and explosions.

We've seen Tatooine-style settlements, populated with AI-people going about their AI-controlled AI-business, while outside the city walls roam some big ol' mutants. We've also seen spaceships zipping through space in as predictably impressive a manner as could possibly be imagined. Each planet is set to host a massive chunk of content, in terms of both gameplay and physical size, and there will be between six and eight (it's yet to be decided) of these planets to discover.

LOST IN SPACE

The Precursors' biggest draw is this ability to go from fighting on a planet's surface to fighting in a planet's orbit, and although the transition isn't seamless (instead, in what I personally find a massive disappointment, it takes one loading screen to get into your ship, and another to get into space), the fact that these two drastically different playing styles are being juggled is something that will pique the interests of fans of both the FPS and space shooter genre.

On the ground, the inclusion of 'Transformers are so in right now' mechs, and organic alien weapons, despite basically being guns with eyes which you have to poke in shameful places to 'reload', drag the game further and further away from your typical shooter. And when in space, it's possible to board other ships, and be boarded, which throws you back into an FPS perspective inside your craft, defending it from intruders.

Sounds amazing on paper, but Deep Shadows didn't create a stellar reputation for themselves with *Boiling 'Illegal Operation' Point*, and that particular title will hang over their heads until they redeem themselves in gamers' cruelly judging eyes. However, with both *The Precursors* and *White Gold*, they've got something they didn't have with *Boiling Point*: time, and an empty space where an annoying publisher used to stand and shout at them while waving a stick. Could this be another case of Deep Shadows biting off more than they can chew? Or have they learned their lessons from the hovering pumas? We're hoping so, because hovering pumas have so much to teach the world. PCZ

ETA 2009

HOLDING OUT FOR A...

DUNGEON HERO

PCZONE ON THE DVD

Will Porter **sits in on feverish plans to get dungeon crawling up from its hands and knees...**

DEVELOPER Firefly Studios **PUBLISHER** Gamecock **WEBSITE** www.gamecockmedia.com **PREVIOUSLY IN...** N/A

THE LOWDOWN

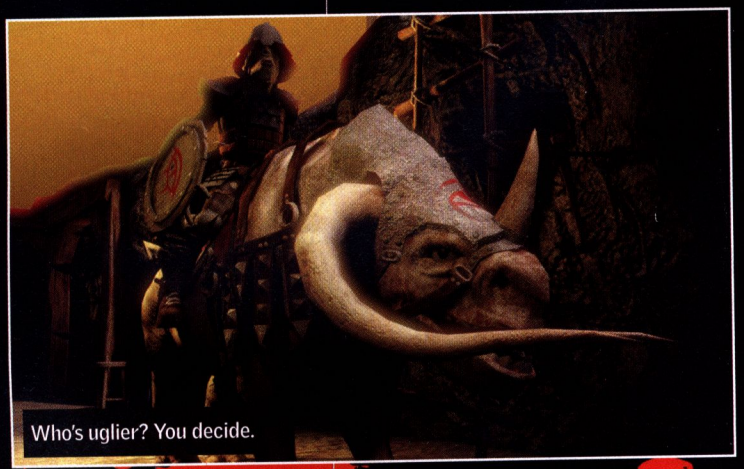
Living, breathing and 'realistic' dungeon	✓
Bustling and varied city hub	✓
Button-mashing frowned upon	✓
Contains toilets	✓
Absolutely miles off	✗

FANTASY OFTEN HAS a few holes in. Take Mordor's representation at the close of the cinematic *Rings* jaunt – a dusty, arid surface with a bunch of orcs just standing around shouting at each other. Where was the infrastructure? Where did the greenskins do their shopping? Where were the basic sanitation facilities? Great as Peter Jackson's vision was, it's doubtful he'd ever get a job as a town planner. The same is true of your average dungeon: who, honestly, leaves a big chest full of treasure just lying around next to a badly concealed pit trap? A bloody idiot, that's who.

"Why has someone left that gold?" continues a concerned Simon Bradbury of Firefly studios. "Why hasn't that spider eaten those goblins? Why are they just standing there waiting for me to kill them? I mean, ours is a dungeon with toilets in..."

Firefly, you see, have a thoroughly British fascination with toilets. I mean, the last time I spoke to Bradbury, we were discussing the intricacies of the people of ancient Rome having toilets in their kitchens for *CivCity Rome*; the time before that, the importance of the gong-collector in *Stronghold*. Firefly are big on creating places that work – and places without toilets generally don't.

Dungeon Hero is set to be released several aeons from hence (spring 2009 at the last count), but I stamped my little foot until it got a few pages in this issue of *ZONE* this month because it's dead-set on remedying exactly what I dislike about seemingly every dungeon crawl ever created – from *Dungeon Siege* to *Diablo*. Not only is there a bizarre *Deathtrap Dungeon* fantasy set-up that's wholly inconsistent with real life, but also any story feels unnecessary and tacked on. Here, then, an entire living, breathing city with goblins bustling around and going about their daily business is being constructed (somewhat of a Firefly speciality really) – serving as both a foot in reality and as a narrative device.



Who's uglier? You decide.



A portal at this point would be good.

GAGGLE OF GOBLINS

You play as an interloper from the surface, and you're a bit of a git – hacking here and dismembering there. Goblins treat you as an untrustworthy alien, largely ignoring you striding through the streets of their four city districts and bumping your head on the ceilings, concentrating on their own personal clan war. One of the goblins has dug a little too deep though, and tapped a direct connection into death itself. They'll probably start wanting more help when they find that out...

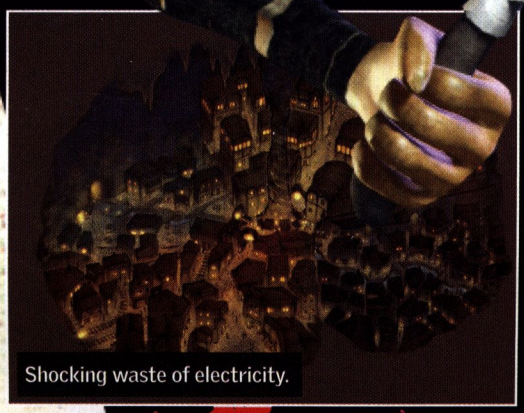
"Goblins have a religion based on trees, and each city suburb is based on these," explains level designer Andrew Parsons. "In Birch, a religious area, you'll see shamans gathering together, other guys preaching to groups of goblins. In direct contrast, meanwhile, you've got The Greys, our slum area, where there's a crack in the cavern roof above it, which means that it's constantly raining. It's the place where the dead, the dying, the diseased, the criminal and the poor can be found. What we're going for there is a *Blade Runner*-type feel."

This city, then, will be the hub of your adventures, changing with the ebbs and flows of the story – should a plague break out, for example, you'll start to see white handprints on doors, green ooze dripping off walls and goblin doctors scurrying from place to place. All around you, Firefly want the city to buzz with activity – the industrial

Comix zone Because trailers are just so passé...

An interesting ploy to help in selling *Dungeon Hero* to the punters is a series of interactive comic-books that Firefly are aiming squarely at desktops worldwide. Bored with endless montages packed with loud music and explosions (as indeed, are we), Firefly are instead concentrating on tightly written short stories based on the goblin occupants of the dungeon – each with the actions of the game's lead character on the periphery. The first sees a goblin wounded in the trenches being worked on by doctors as he rants and raves about his experiences, and is suitably dark and interest-tweaking. More stuff like this please, Mr Games Industry!




Shocking waste of electricity.


All set up for a wonderful evening of musical entertainment.

This has an entire living, breathing city of goblins bustling around...

Oak area, for example, being the gateway to the frontline trenches of the war against the Redeye clan, and as such heaving with weaponsmiths, field-hospitals and the walking wounded.

COMBAT AND SLASH

But what of the hack and the slash? That's getting a revamp from the dungeon masters too – with a studied attempt to remove the button-mashing ethos so entrenched within the genre. There'll be melee and ranged attacks, obviously, but with up to 50 critters swarming around you, the emphasis is on close combat. A right-click will have you block jabs from the more unfriendly people you meet, with the enemy at such proximity you'll have to make yourself space to swing your sword through shield-bashes and headbutts before timing your slashes and flurries to the amount of space you grant yourself. It won't all be depressingly console-like combo moves either, with you swapping around different modes of violence role-play fashion – and very much developing a fighting style of your own.

Dungeon Hero is still miles off but (in a similar fashion to the lofty ambitions of *Hellgate: London*), it's certainly striking in its sheer desire to recreate a tried-and-tested formula in a novel and engaging way. As someone who's shown lethargic and terminally dull *Diablo*-clones on what approaches a bi-weekly basis, it's a breath of refreshingly dank and musty dungeon air in a genre that's been bereft of originality for an extremely long time. PCZ

BOX OF DELIGHTS...

CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO

Will Porter **patiently lets a corpse spew blood in his face before saying how much he enjoyed it...**

DEVELOPER Mercury Steam **PUBLISHER** Codemasters **WEBSITE** www.codemasters.com/jericho **PREVIOUSLY IN...** 179

THE LOWDOWN

- Unique squad members fun to control ✓
- Cracking story and characters ✓
- Paranormal powers fun to use ✓
- Feels just dandy on PC ✓
- Are levels varied enough? ✗



I'VE BEEN GETTING a bit worried about *Jericho*. As with any shooter being co-developed for console and PC, as more and more movies were released of it being a fast-paced, frenetic blaster, my interest just began to wane a little. The concept of seven (eight if you include your floating telepathic ghostly self) paranormal soldiers with insanely destructive abilities trapped in slices of violent history made me giggle, but concerns of potential disdain for mouse and keyboard backed up this laughter with a slight signs of duress in the corners of my eyes. I'm still a little scarred by *Shadowrun*, you see.

But heaven be praised, Mercury Steam seem to know what they're doing and the game feels like it's in the right place. The sluggish mouse control inherent in so many console crossovers is conspicuously absent, while the way in which you have to be directly looking at another squad member in order to nattily transfer your soul (and direct control) before tapping the spacebar is a welcome relief from manually skipping or banging on number keys. It feels sharp, responsive and its manifold weapons are gloriously free of that horrid impact-less 'float', prevalent in so many shooters created in a developer's own brand of engine. All good: but just how horrified are we going to get?

PASS THE BUCKET?

A colleague enquires: "Is that fat bloke hanging on those chains pissing blood all over you?" Thankfully not a question I've been asked before, but also sadly one I have to respond to in the negative.

In fact, the fat bloke in question – a Roman governor known as Vicus, trapped forever in the Pyxsis void around Al-Khali – was holding apart two bloody chunk-curtains of his belly and letting toxic blood gush from his blackened navel and into the face of a pretty psychic sniper whose mind I was occupying at the time. There's a subtle difference. And yes, *Jericho* is horrid and its enemies suitably shiny with moist slime and blood – even if moments of more traditional horror are seen in the *Tomb Raider: Legend*-esque interactive cut-scenes so much in vogue these days.

It isn't the Barker-isms that make the game stand-out though, strange as it is to have action regaled by screams akin to "babies being dipped in hot oil" (his words, not mine).

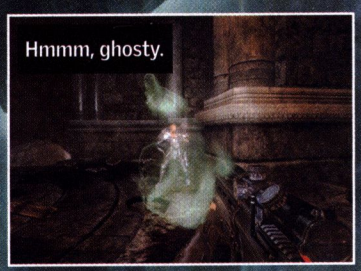
Each squad member has an entirely different feel, with unique skills that are genuinely fun to use. Borderline-autistic genius Simone Cole, for example, can spot enemy weakspots, freeze time or magic-up extra ammo with a wrist-mounted computer. Tank character Xavier Jones has a fire demon that looks suspiciously like a flaming cobra skeleton to accompany his mini-gunning that whistles around the level, setting fire to those it meets. Billie Church cuts herself to create a hovering pile of blood tentacles to hold enemies in place so her friends can shoot them in the face. Best of all, with Abigail Black you can control bullets with a *Max Payne*-style onboard camera – so three dripping, moaning figures in front of you can have a single sniper bullet steered into their respective heads, letting you admire three decapitated



So tasty, you'll want to lick your screen.



Expect bullet-time, blood and gore.



Hmmm, ghosty.

THE STORY SO FAR...

MERCURY STEAM

Scrappy do
The trend of having a name in games begins with *American McGee Presents Scrapland*.

2004

Then Jericho
The gang step out with Clive Barker and Codies with monster mischief on their mind.

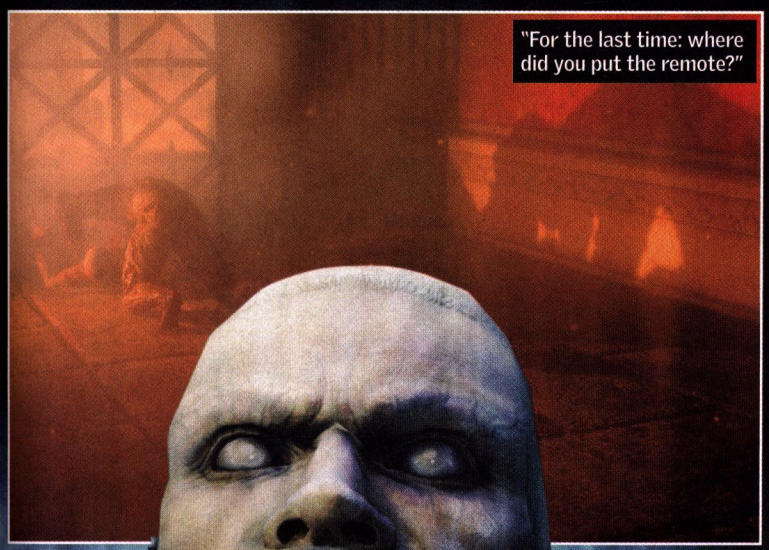
2006

More gore
Jericho comes to fruition. Horrid, bloody chunks of fruition.

2007

And many more?
Will the *Jericho* team embark on further adventures? Barker certainly hopes so...

The future



The Go! Team

The squad that flays together, stays together...



As is the fashion, *Jericho* features squad commands – but it does it in a far less fiddly way than the normal 'right click, stand behind that wall I'm looking at' dynamic. Knock the mouse wheel forward and the character you're controlling will bark in the deceased squad leader's voice to press forward, pull it back and the 'hold up!' command will be issued. What with each character blessed with two firing modes and two supernatural powers, meanwhile, the number keys are freed up to order the two halves of your team (alpha and omega) around the map by tapping 1 or 3 and seeing your pals jog off to where you're staring. It feels natural and fun, but whether or not it'll actually come in useful for anything but the hardest of difficulty modes is still an unknown quality.





corpses collapsing in the distance as soon as you revert to first-person.

ALL FALL DOWN

Are there issues? Sure – boss battles seem a tad simplistic, the difficulty curve still needs tweaking and levels are potentially a tad samey despite being fine examples of period corridoriana. *Jericho* doesn't veer wildly from the traditional linear shooter blueprint, but certainly has an impressive sheen provided by script, character, voice-acting and excellent music, alongside its lakes of blood, guts and shit. It's packed with incidental visual niceties too – from a shadowy child beckoning you into the hellhole its soul has been trapped in, to the way corpses fidget after you've filled them with bullets, before being thrown into the air and overrun by a swarm of flies.

With Clive Barker in outright creative control of the project (as I type, the last level is being completely redone at his command), there's little doubt that this is a game that fans of horror can't ignore. It's not as clever as *Undying*, but it certainly has more flayed skin hanging on hooks, angry medieval child-soldiers and bullet-time. Will the finished game provide enough variety? Well, the bottomless pit that is Barker's worryingly disturbed imagination must have proved helpful... PCZ



1

HOT SHOTS

GEARS OF WAR

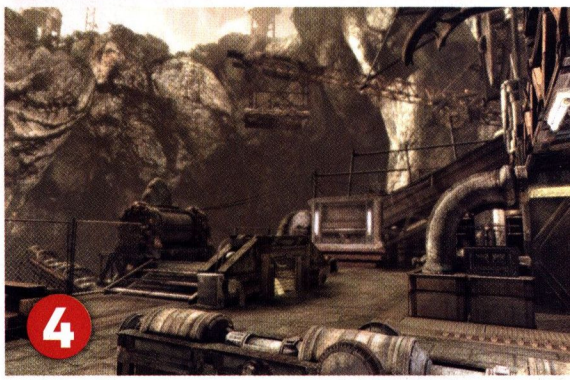
DEVELOPER Epic Games **PUBLISHER** Microsoft **WEB** gearsofwar.com **ETA** Q4

WHO EVER THOUGHT we'd see those three words on these pages? Well, quite a lot of us we imagine, it's not like the development of a PC version of the Xbox 360's best-selling title is the industry's best-kept secret. But here it is, and Microsoft have seen fit to not only keep all of the best parts of the 360 version, such as online co-op, but they've gone and given us some exclusive stuff too, like the giant Brumak boss and five new levels, each one browner and grainier than the last. Take a look at this little lot...

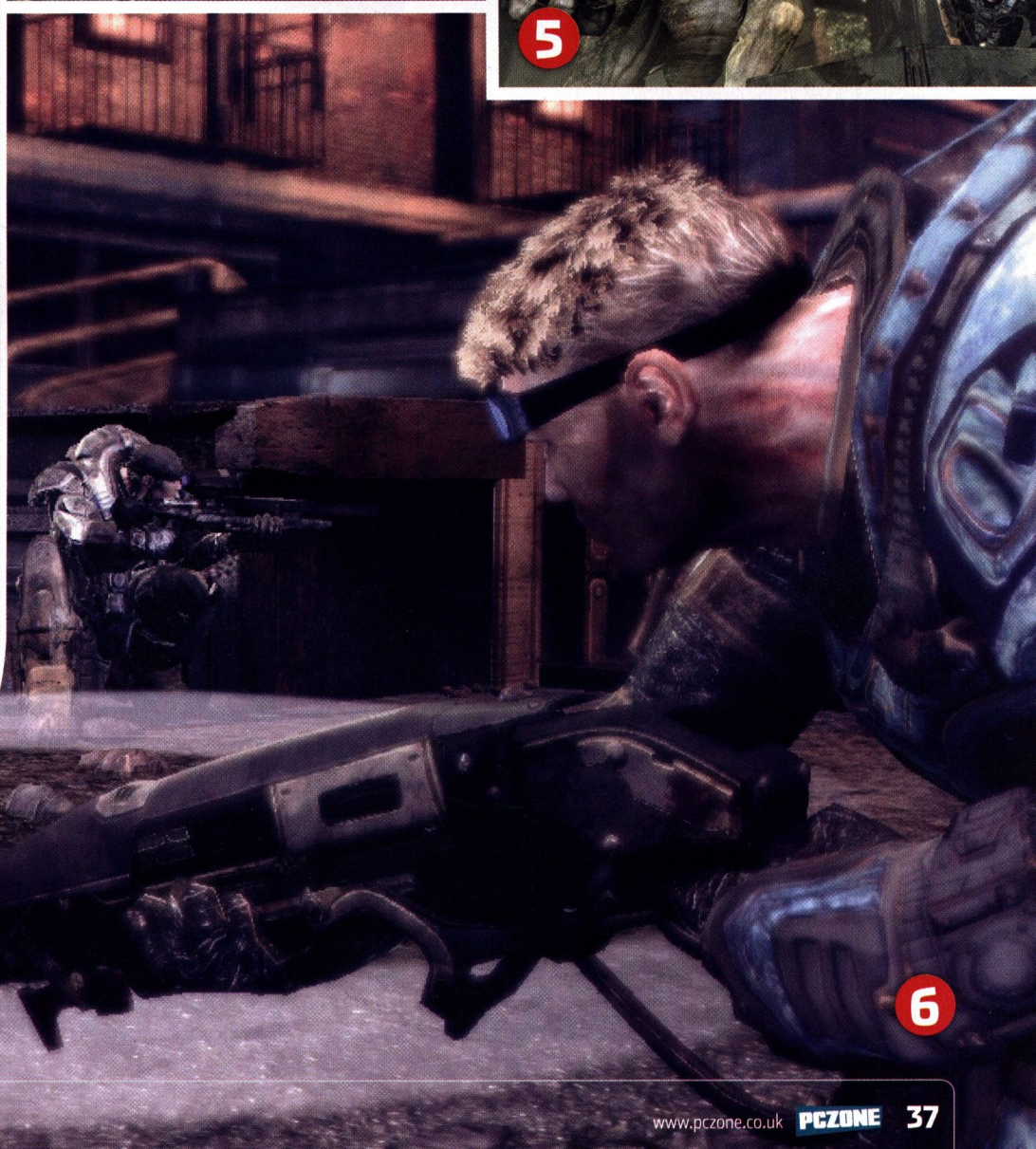
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The Bigger Picture

1. **BRUMAK ATTACK**
This massive Brumak, which we've all decided is just a Rancor with a guy on top of it, will be exclusive to the PC version.

2. **LOCUST SWARM**
That guy in the foreground is part of The Locust Horde, one of the bad guys. Apologies to 360 owners who already know this.

3. **EXPLOSIVE EXCLUSIVE**
Five new single-player levels will be on our PC version – we're guessing these will become downloadable for 360 too, in time.

4. **EDITORS**
Our fair PCs will also get a level editor, which isn't in this picture, but we need to tell you about anyway. Take *that*, console dicks.

5. **HELPING HAND**
Finding the single-player game too difficult? Call a mate through Games For Windows LIVE, and he can hop in and hop out of your game.

6. **FUN FOR EVERYONE**
The best part is that Microsoft for once have decided not to be all precious about their new OS, and so both XP and Vista users can play.

7. **STAYING LIVE**
Gears Of War practically carried LIVE on 360, so we're guessing it'll work similar wonders for the markedly less cohesive Games For Windows service. Perhaps.



WILL PORTER PRESENTS

THIS MONTH: ASSASSIN'S CREED

A day after I played *Assassin's Creed*, someone told me he thought it was rubbish. Replete with crap controls, daft dives into hay carts from towering minarets and silly combat. This man was wrong. I honestly believe that the semi-negative coverage of *Assassin's Creed* based on the playable code at this year's E3 all stems from the fact that people simply didn't understand the intricacies of the controls. It isn't a 'tap button X to jump, tap button Y to slash' affair – you have different stances governed by which key you're pressing at the time; the control of Altair is like a cross between that of Link in *Zelda* and Twinsen's adjustable mood settings in the *Little Big Adventure* games of old.

So it is, then, that the same button will do different things depending on your stance – with one you brush past someone in a crowd, while with another you shove them. In 'exciting stance!', meanwhile, you automatically leap over gaps and shimmy up climbable walls. This feeds into the combat too – which is intuitive, yet a difficult beast to master due to each stance having different moves, good timing being a necessity and the art of blocking being vital. Without a hand-holding introduction to explain all of this, I suspect my foolish friend became confused.

Thing is, given Ubisoft's recent track record on PC (uniformly appalling in terms of buggy releases), the fact that the Ubi rep sitting next to me as I played the game on 360 had no inkling there'd be a PC version, and the further fact that the gamepad controls would be fairly tricky to pull off on a mouse and keyboard, my brow remains furrowed over the proposed simultaneous cross-platform release come November. Still, if it stays true to the freeform dream and can turn its crowd dynamics into viable gameplay, then *Assassin's Creed* could be a barnstormer on any machine. I'm just keeping my fingers crossed that the version on our own platform appears unscathed.



Remember: short, controlled bursts.



"Woah! This war's gone all hazy, man!"

HEEDING THE CALL

Eagerly awaited *Call Of Duty 4* continues to capture hearts, minds, other noteworthy body parts

www.charlieoscardelta.com | ETA: November

IS *CALL OF DUTY* just a one-trick pony? That's the question Infinity Ward have been going all out to render null and void of late – most recently with some gameplay that pretty much set E3 alight. For starters, there was some immaculately scripted stealth alongside a fellow SAS operative – and when we say stealth, we mean wearing a proper 'lie down and look like a small shrub' ghillie suit. It was full-on peeking through windows at formidable Russian foes, whispered arguments and silent movement, with a climax in which you lie trembling and half-hidden in a field as a contingent of enemies slowly stalk towards your barely concealed self.

Unsurprisingly, though, it wasn't all lying around. Another Middle Eastern sequence, which was zoomed straight into by way of a Google Earth-style satellite view, saw more helicopters flailing through the air to their probable destruction than you could shake a stick at. This was during a pre-dawn assault on a Middle Eastern suburb in pursuit of a stranded tank – beginning in darkness with your grainy night vision picking out enemy laser sights sweeping through deserted buildings, and ending with an exposed last-ditch battle in nearby wasteland.

Especially noteworthy in what was on show was some stunning animation as soldiers ran hither and thither, stumbling, diving, grappling and (inevitably) being blown up and getting hurled into walls. Neat little touches such as bullets penetrating said walls and taking out enemies cowering behind them were also in evidence, as were possibly the most deafening game sound effects that we've ever come across – explosions, rat-a-tat-tats and so forth. Honestly, you will not be disappointed.

GOLDEN JOYSTICK TURNS SILVER

25 years of golden gaming celebrated

HEAVENS ABOVE! IS it really a whole year since Justin Lee-Collins ridiculed the surnames of key industry figures, and did a randy bumming mime on the editors of popular magazines? The oldest and biggest gaming awards ceremony turns 25 this year. It's that exclusive even we can't go, so any corporate readers with more money than friends, could they please invite Steve and Log to sit with them.

The annual torrent of logos and branding this year includes CVG (of course), GamesRadar, Next Gen, *The Sun*, *Bliss* and god knows who and what else. By the time you read this, we'll be at the shortlist stage, so you don't even have to think that much, just choose your favourites from the 10-15 on offer.

The orgy of excellence is 100% gamer-voted, so if you don't vote for *Dora The Explorer*, and *Pippa Funnell* wins the *Bliss* Girl's Choice Award, you've only got your own stinking apathy to blame. Vote now at www.goldenjoystick.com, and you could win tickets to the event and after-show party – so you might get to dance with a drunken Jimmy Carr. Shit, yeah!



"The free bar's which way?"



Conan: a much-loved character. Unlike Steve Hogarty.

FREE KEY FRIDAY

ZONE readers are invited to the *Conan* Beta

IF YOU SUBSCRIBE to Steve Hogarty's offensive and under-informed opinions on the fantasy world of Robert E Howard, then you'll probably not be interested in the Beta of Conan MMO, *Hyborian Adventures*.

If, however, you're one of the irate *Conan* fans who emailed Steve to call him a "closet homosexual who masturbates on fat arses" – or perhaps you were one of the more eloquent gents who wished sackings and death on him – then you'll be looking forward to playing the hack-and-slash online RPG.

And it's to you this article's aimed, because we've got keys waiting for you on the *PC ZONE* website. So leave the magazine open on this page, run upstairs and log on to our website at www.pczone.co.uk, which is where those keys are. And you don't have to go on a Friday, that was just for the sake of a weak pun about a 2003 Disney remake, in which Lindsay Lohan and Jamie Lee Curtis learned valuable life lessons and empathy by swapping bodies.

ARGUE THE TOSS

THIS MONTH: PEGGLE INTERVENTION

Dear Steve,
Everyone loves a joke, and I'm as big a fan of mindless time-wasting as anyone I know, but you've got to get yourself off the *Peggle*. I can't be too harsh, because I was briefly bitten by that bastard child of Bagatelle myself. But you're still playing! Every lunch, after-hours, you play! It's called casual gaming, not mentally ill gaming for obsessive idiots. Come back, Steve. We'll bake a cake. We miss you.
Jon 'Log' Blyth

Dear Log,
No thank you! I've gotten 100% clear on all but nine levels, completed all of the challenges and the adventure mode, and I *know* there's a secret prize waiting for me when I finally conquer this game. My guess, and I'm only guessing here, is that Bjorn the Unicorn will trot imperceptibly backwards on the menu screen, to reveal an unexplained email address. I'll send an email, receiving an immediate reply ordering me to meet under the old pier, which I'll do. The man I meet will tell me I'm the first to contact him, and most likely the last. I'll try to speak, but he'll place his downy finger against my lips and hush me. Then he'll sweep away some sand to reveal a hatch. "Just watch," he'll calmly say as he opens the hatch. A bright light will emanate from the hole.

As I step down into this gloriously colourful world, I'll realise immediately where I am. "Welcome to the *Peggle* Institute!" the man will announce. It will be like Richard Scarry's Busy Town, but there'll be Bjorn walking down the road on the way to the shops. "Hi Steve!" he'll shout. Then I will notice Lord Cinderbottom, selling fruit and his fruit stall, and he will also welcome me heartily, before burping fire on some apricots. "Still got the hiccups?" Jimmy Lightning will quip as he passes on his skateboard. I will laugh, because Jimmy Lightning is so funny. Kat Tut will carelessly potter down the road in a comically undersized car, swerving to avoid Renfield the pumpkin, who'll be on his way to a birthday party. "What the peg?!" he'll yell, "watch where you're going you mad cat!"

"This is a safe place for you now, because you are so good at *Peggle*," the man will inform me, still with his arm outstretched towards the vibrant town. Then he'll pull off his face and he'll be the owl who does the Zen Ball. "What about my friends?" I'll ask. "Forget about your friends and your colleague Log – they're all inferior *Peggle* players," he'll respond. The hatch will slam shut. The *Peggle* Institute will dull slightly. At least that's what I'm guessing!
Steve Hogarty

Dear Steve,
What?
Jon 'Log' Blyth

A tale of two F.E.A.R.s

Will Porter **consoles a frightened child caught in a tug of love between two bickering parents. But then his eyes start bleeding...**

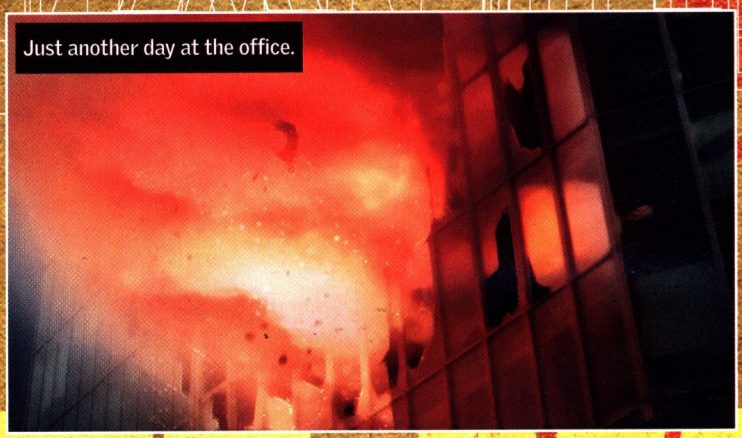


ONCE UPON A time there was a game called *F.E.A.R.*, and even though it was a vastly unnecessary acronym, it was widely lauded as an excellent provenor of intuitive AI and slo-mo instances of glorious ultra-violence. Since then, however, the good ship Alma has sailed through choppy waters.

Developers Monolith were taken over by Warner Brothers yet remained rather attached to their creation, while erstwhile publishers Vivendi had pumped a lot of time and money into creating a new *F.E.A.R.* franchise that had suddenly begun to circle the drain. Countless enriched lawyers later, and we have a two-pronged assault on the paranormal violence. Monolith retain rights to the storyline, characters and technology; while Vivendi own the name, and the ability to pump out expansions for the original game – even if they choose to do odd stuff within them like reincarnate Norton Mapes (who apparently survived a bullet wound AND outran a nuclear explosion).

LOOKS FAMILIAR

The new Monolith game, then, remains untitled (at the time of going to press at least), and unrepentant. Starting 30 minutes before the end of the original game, and featuring a lead protagonist apparently clad in the garb of the clones you once gunned down so merrily, the first thing you clock onto when gazing at Monolith's new brand of *F.E.A.R.* is that not that much has changed. Sure, the panicking doctors leaning over your prostrate body on an operating table are now beautifully detailed, and the beasties you see guzzling on your flesh as you dip in and out of consciousness are graphically above and beyond anything you saw last time around.



Just another day at the office.

However, as you wake up in the empty hospital *28 Days Later*-style, slip on the new-fangled goggles that make up your HUD in the game and set off into corridor-iana, you realise that although we're not in Kansas anymore, we certainly haven't gone far. Nebraska, perhaps.

CRIMSON TIDE

As you shotgun soldiers into red clouds of blood and flying limbs though, and stand there grinning with blotches of blood covering your visor, you'll remark on a few subtle changes. The AI is a marked step-up, for example, granting the game a far more defined feeling of sandbox combat – something aided by your new-found ability to grab corridor furniture and create temporary cover. It isn't all about combat smarts either: set a goon on fire and he'll become quite intent on putting the flames out. He might dive into water, roll around on the ground screaming, simply pat himself down or (if the dire warnings of Fire Service educational tool Welephant were not a part of his training), panic and jump out of a window in aid of visually glorious brouhaha.

The healthpacks, meanwhile, have been replaced by the magic healing-over-time systems of *Halo* or *COD2*. Oh, and these aren't clone soldiers you're fighting by the way – they're everyday Joes sent to clear the hospital of paranormal weirdos like your good self; it's beginning to look like you play a bad guy.

RED ALERT

Because, let's not forget, that blood is present here by the bucketload: handprints, footprints, *Da Vinci Code*-style spirals of type A-positive red



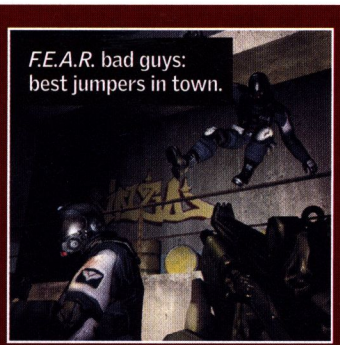
Hints at a more open setting for the new *F.E.A.R.* game are also rife. And with more crashed planes, for sure.

For her next trick, Alma will challenge her classmates to a game of 'Stuck In The Blood'.

And let us not forget...

Introducing *F.E.A.R: Perseus Mandate*...

Vivendi's efforts to wring ever more pound coins from Alma's dank black hair continue with this the second standalone expansion pack to the vanilla shadowy outing. *Extraction Point* was needless guff, but this one doesn't look half so bad. Taking place in parallel to parts of the original *F.E.A.R.* (and perhaps revisiting a few locations on the way), it sees you and a team of fellow operatives fending off a group intent on stealing a bunch of Armacham's cool stuff. Don't expect Shakespeare, but do expect a neat-o grenade launcher whose emissions chucks out nails at the point of impact.



F.E.A.R. bad guys: best jumpers in town.

words up and down walls, limbs falling out of ventilation shafts... It's a biblical plague that even Moses would have baulked at. And oh, but the animation is stunning. One moment in the hospital level sees a skittering dead body in green hospital garb treading over walls and ceilings before backflipping onto the edge of a porter's trolley and retaining his balance with an arched back in true Justin Timberlake fashion.

There's just something so natural (and unnatural, I suppose) about it that it certainly takes you aback; although perhaps not as aback as when the wiry little chap leaps onto you, slashes at your face, then, thankfully, slowly gets sucked into a bloody, meaty vortex that appears alongside Alma in the corridor. "We all fall down," solemnly intones the little lady as a finale, as she stands over you and the screen fades to black.

If Monolith's promise of less repeated environments stays true (and it had better), then they could well be onto a winner here. Unless of course the opposition have something even more special up their sleeve with their own *F.E.A.R.* sequel... PCZ



GIB APPRECIATION
A cynic might suggest that you'll rarely see guts so perfectly poised, but that cynic would be wrong. Epic's new 'slow bubble' deployable is essentially a giant fish tank of bullet-time. Like the energy fields at the close of *Half-Life 2*, they'll see players, bullets and gibs enclosed within, moving at a beautiful, bloody snail's pace.

HOT SHOT

UNREAL TOURNAMENT III

PCZONE ON THE DVD

DEVELOPER Epic Games **PUBLISHER** Midway **WEB** www.unrealtournament3.com **ETA** October **PREVIOUSLY IN...** 180

ONCE A DREAM of a game sitting on the horizon, the *Unreal Tournament* juggernaut is suddenly looming in the near-distance – and, quite frankly, it's looking and feeling quite remarkable. Whereas worries of *Quake Wars'* graphics not matching its immaculately poised promotional screenshots are rife, we can guarantee you that in the gooey, maimed flesh, *UT* genuinely does live up to the graphical hype. From the animation on the tiny little spider-mine bots, who you can lead into harms way on a Pied Piper-jaunt with your Link gun, right up to the way the tentacles on the rolling energy globe of the Necris Scavenger continually search for footholds on the landscape, it's a visual tour de force. And the gameplay? Sublime. Not long to go either...



ORDNANCE SURVEY FRENZY
The number of game modes may have come in for streamlining, but the amount of content certainly hasn't. *UTIII* will come out with 40 maps bulging under its gorgeously rendered overcoat. All of which makes *Shadowrun* appearing on the scene with only nine even more laughable.

MORE THAN JUST A PRETTY FACE
Player models are now ultra-customisable, and can be given different masks and facial attire. This means that rather than being cruelly murdered by a faceless clone, you'll come to recognise your foe more easily and lust after more satisfying revenge than in previous iterations.

LOAD UP, LOAD OUT
Weapons have received a few nips and tucks. Dual enforcers (pistols) return from older iterations, the mini-gun now nails people to walls, and gaze deep into a Bio-Gun's ooze and you'll see tiny caustic organisms floating in its green depths. As for the Redeemer – the thinking man's BFG – he remains king-daddy of all.



WELCOME TO VAULT 101

You'll Never Leave...

Will Porter prepares to walk the wastes...

"War, war never changes. Since the dawn of humankind, when our ancestors first discovered the killing power of rock and bone, blood has been spilled in the name of everything; from god, to justice to simple psychotic rage. In the year 2077, after a millennia of armed conflict, the destructive nature of man could contain itself no longer. The world was plunged into an abyss of nuclear fire and radiation. But it was not, as some had predicted, the end of the world. Instead, the apocalypse was simply the prologue to another bloody chapter of human history. For man had succeeded in destroying the world. But war, war never changes.

"In the early days, thousands were spared the horrors of the holocaust by taking refuge in enormous underground shelters, known as vaults. But when they emerged they had only the hell of the wastes to greet them. All except those of Vault 101. For on that fateful day, when fire rained from the sky, the giant steel door of Vault 101 remained closed and never reopened. It was here you were born, it is here you will die. Because in Vault 101, no-one ever enters and no-one ever leaves."

Narrator (Ron Perlman)

AS THE NARRATION hits its stride and a skull and ribcage half-buried in sand appear in *Fallout 3's* introduction, I suppress the little voice that's asking, no, *begging* me to stand up, stride around Bethesda's viewing area Poirot-style with my index finger raised in the air before pointing directly at the game's executive producer and loudly saying: "I put it to you, Todd Howard, that this very scene is taken directly – directly! – from the image you saw when you died in *Fallout*!" At this point everyone would have applauded, and Howard would have come down from his control platform and given me a medal for being the biggest, bestest *Fallout* fan that there ever was. I would then have rolled over to let him tickle my tummy and we'd live forever in a little house on a prairie, where I'd often fetch sticks for him.

NUCLEAR FAMILY

It's a strange fantasy (my girlfriend is a patient soul), but one that hit me again, and again and again as I was guided through the newly first person-ised wastes of *Fallout 3*. And I'm not just talking about the reappearance of Vault Boy's friendly face, or even the PIPBoy PDA gloriously strapped to your wrist. I'm talking about the little things. Within the Vault 101 itself even ventilation shafts, previously a



The whole damn thing still reeks of *Fallout*. Whoever thought there could be so many shades of brown?

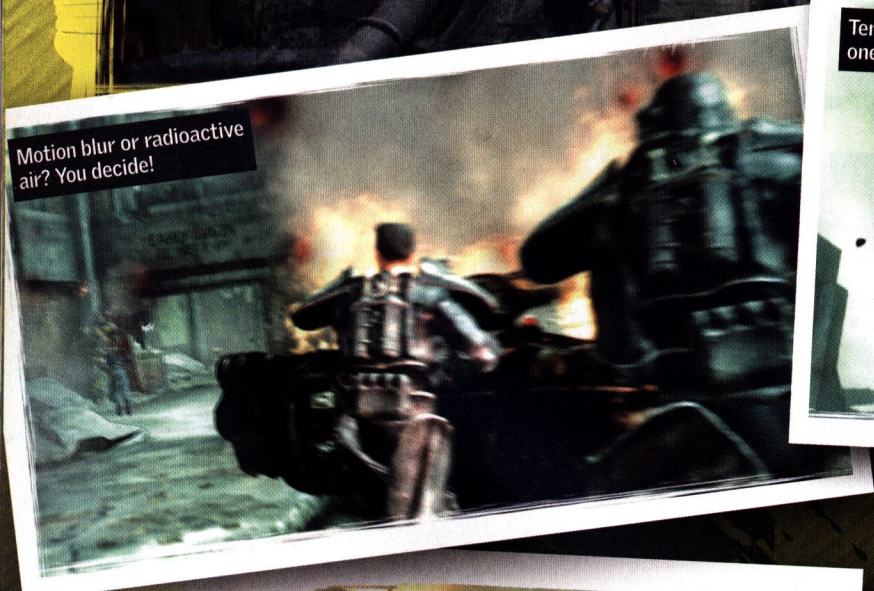
smattering of pixels high that said 'rattle rattle rattle' when you fiddled them, give an almost uncanny sensation of déjà vu.

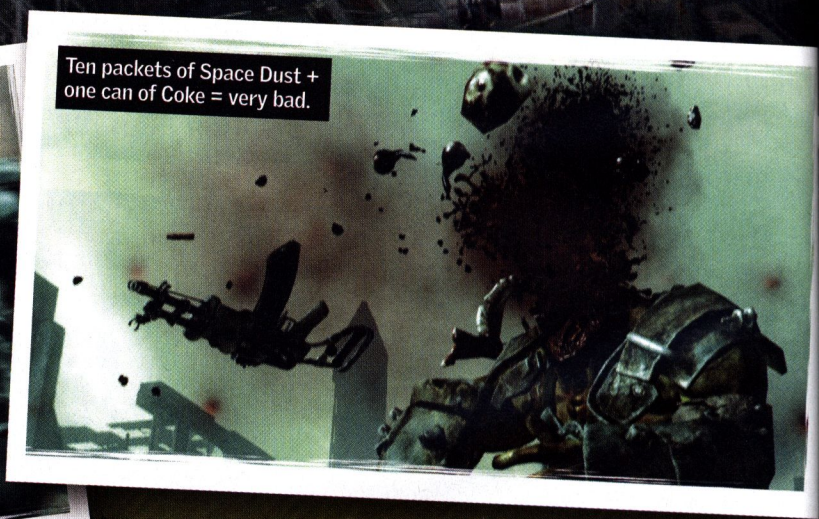
The same is true top-side as you enter the town of Megaton and a wary local sheriff warns you not to misbehave (as they always would back in the day before you did misbehave); or stand outside the Washington DC HQ of Galaxy News and see the globe that previously spun in intro scenes of previous *Fallouts* rendered as a glorious 3D statue. Much time has passed, but the whole damn thing just reeks of *Fallout*. Whoever thought there could be quite so many shades of brown?

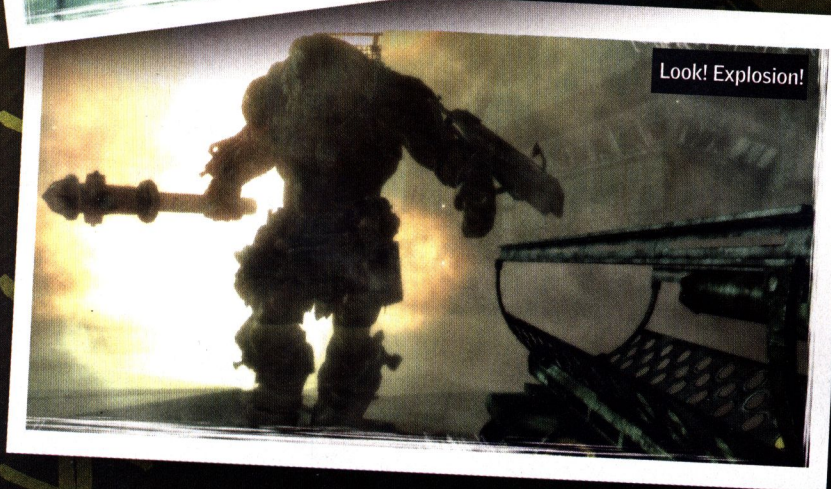
The *Fallout* treatise states that come the year 2077, everyone lives in a very *Jetsons*-esque future – Mr Handy robots trundle around being helpful and saying "Good day to you sir!", and cars are powered by nuclear fusion. Unfortunately though, mankind still hasn't quite kicked the habit of murdering people, and things, quite spectacularly, fall apart.

A quick cut to 200 years into the future and the world is an arid, irradiated wasteland – peppered with death, decay, rusted-out cars harbouring rather explosive engines and cheery robots who have learned




Motion blur or radioactive air? You decide!


Ten packets of Space Dust + one can of Coke = very bad.


Look! Explosion!

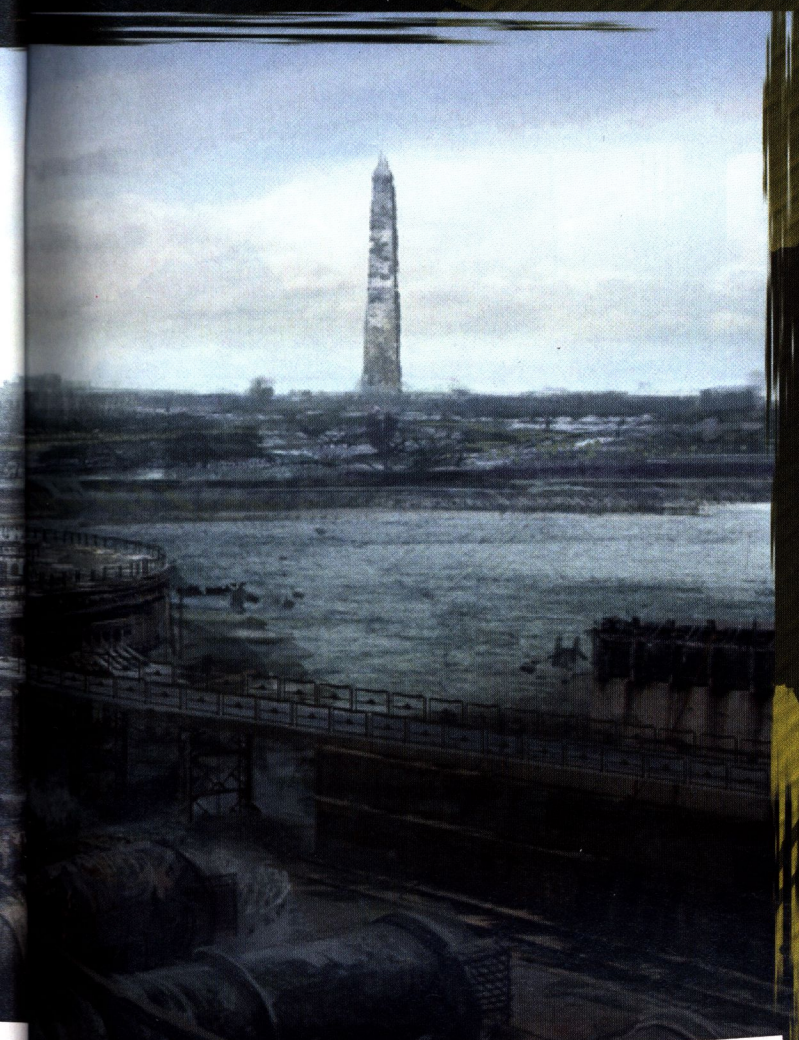
to call you a 'stupid git' as soon as your back is turned.

The game proper, as most things do, begins with a birth: your birth, deep within the loving steel confines of Vault 101. It's at this point that your masked father runs a DNA test on you, letting you choose your basic character details such as race and sex, after which your father will magically remove his mask to show that he shares the same genetic material. He'll always have the voice of Liam Neeson though, that's a given.

Later, as the action skips to your first birthday, old Qui-Gon will presumably blow a party streamer in your face (I didn't actually see this bit) before presenting you with a book called 'You're SPECIAL!' in which you can choose your attributes. Then when you're 16, having presumably warned you of the dangers of unprotected sex, Rob Roy rushes you into a G.O.A.T. test for you to choose some specific skills. (For more, see 'And Your Specialist Subject Is?', p47.)

GOING UNDERGROUND

200 years of isolation have bred a sense of claustrophobia and paranoia, with an almost dictatorial leader who has an intense mistrust of the outside world. Indeed, the Orwellian overtones of both the Vault's number and the nearby presence of Washington DC suggests that Bethesda may well be about to get a mite more political than previous *Elder Scrolls* bouts with Emperor Curious Septic III, or whoever.



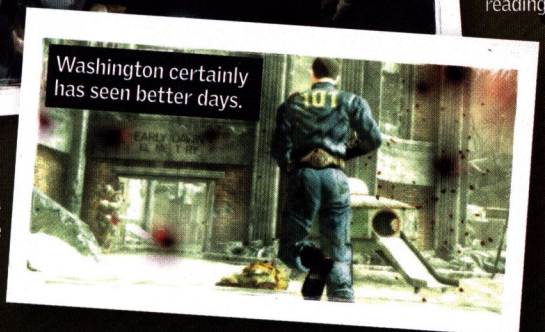
And your specialist subject is?

Showing exactly what's so S.P.E.C.I.A.L. about a G.O.A.T.



The way *Fallout* works is to have some configurable stats at the your character's base wrapped up the acronym S.P.E.C.I.A.L. – standing for Strength, Perception, Endurance, Charisma, Intelligence, Agility and Luck. Overall, these stats are quite hard to upgrade as the game draws on, but can be buffed through drug abuse when the need or addiction arises. The results of your G.O.A.T. test (General Occupation Aptitude Test), meanwhile, will have seen you tweaking your 21 skills – Speak, Repair, Big Guns, Medicine and the like. As you level-up (and you'll be pleased to know that *Oblivion's* controversial levelling system has been ditched), points are freed up for you to spend in each skill, while three that you've earmarked as your specialist subjects get twice the love. It's the best RPG system ever. *Ever*.





200 years of isolation have bred a sense of claustrophobia and a mistrust of the outside world...

Nevertheless your early years are a little less profound – dealing with a gang of *Rebel Without A Cause*-style greasers called the Tunnel Snakes who habitually pick on a good lady friend of yours (or ignoring them should you wish), and generally getting along with life underground. Until, that is, your father disappears when you're 19 – and your isolationist Overseer assumes you had something to do with his disappearance topside. You know what happens next.

"That is one big gun!" half-shouts the idiot German journalist who's been sitting next to me as he desperately tries to impress our hosts. I shake my head. He'll never get a medal for being special, not like me. "That is NOT a gun," affirms Todd Howard from his control platform, as I cross my legs, purse my lips and sashay my lower back and shoulders in the fool's direction. It's actually a gigantic metal key, hanging from the rafters – as any fule kno. It's just waiting for you to hack into the computer system to see it plunge into that beautiful cog door and let in some fresh air to the accompanied screams of Vault dwellers: "He's opening the door! Someone call the Overseer!" Then it's a brief clamber over long-dropped placards reading, 'Let us in you fuckers!', and a brief ascent into daylight.

Now, if we were playing the original games at this point there'd be a half-hour battle with 25 angry rats – so even the most fervent of interweb *F03* naysayers will have to admit that an element of progress has been made...

BLASTER-THON

So we're out in the wasteland – where the Bethesda buzzword is that post-*Oblivion*, 'destruction is the new trees'. Blasted rocks, a frazzled petrol station and simple burnt desert make up your initial impressions of an area roughly the same size as that of Cyrodiil – albeit with far less (yet far more interesting) inhabitants. It's here that, rummaging around in your Vault-issued and numeral-emblazoned boiler suit, you'll get the first taste of combat – against the giant ants, rad-scorpions and general irradiated critters of this new frontier.

SHOOT TO KILL

The simple way is to aim the hollower end of your weapon towards an oncoming foe and click your old friend the left-mouse button, but thankfully it isn't always that simple. Your V.A.T.S. (Vault-Tec Assisted Targeting System) means that, should you have enough action points, time can be frozen and specific shots or swipes made – with each potential hit area outlined in a fetching green timbre with percentage likelihoods for your attack hitting home depending on your skills and attributes.

A leg-shot might result in your enemy limping, an arm-shot might result in a dropped weapon, an antenna-shot might result in an extremely confused giant ant and a head-shot might result in a slo-mo bullet camera-chase and a satisfying burst of meaty chunks and claret. What with

Greatest hits of Fallout

Porter's personal highlights of his wasted wasteland years



Bob's Iguana bits

After a little detective work, you realise that lovable meat-on-stick vendor Bob is selling human flesh bought from the charmingly named Dr Morbid. Rather than blow the whistle, I blackmailed him for a few hundred caps a week. They tasted like chicken.



Exile ending

The end of *Fallout* was a brilliant kick in the teeth. After saving the world from a mutant/cult conspiracy and finding Vault 13 a new water chip, there was no loving Vault embrace – I was too corrupted by the outside world. It was a fair cop – I had been up to mischief.



Bridge of Death

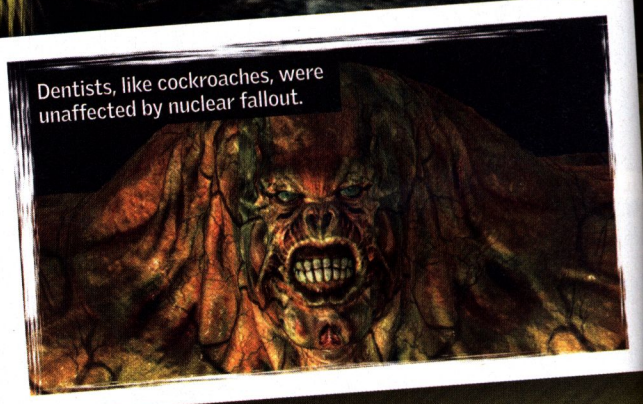
In *Fallout 2*, there was a direct recreation of *The Holy Grail's* Bridge of Death scene. "For some reason, I think I should save my game in a new slot," my character mused as he approached the bridgekeeper, before being turned into bloody guts.



New Reno

Bethesda say they aren't keen on the more puerile bits of *Fallout 2*, but I earmark visiting the New Reno porn studios and shagging the nearby wife and daughter of a local mob boss as formative moments in my adolescence. At least I know that I never want to be a fluffer.





Dentists, like cockroaches, were unaffected by nuclear fallout.



action points regenerating over time, it's a nimble way of merging the old school with the new school. Ending up with middle school, I suppose; only with even more swearing and violence.

FALLING DOWN?

Any caveats so far? Well, I'm a huge *Fallout* fan. You don't really get much bigger. (Well, you do but I guess I'm the smiling face of an unhappy bunch – one far less susceptible to throwing furniture at the walls or squatting atop my swivel chair, holding my knees, hopping up and down and hooting balefully at the internet.) I was just slightly concerned by the emphasis on spectacle and high-intensity action on show at my sneak-peek's climax – namely picking up a Fatboy missile launcher and firing miniature nukes at a goliath super-mutant behemoth.

Now, I'm just as aroused at the thought of running through a wrecked Washington DC with the famed Brotherhood of Steel as the next man – but for me, *Fallout* should be more subtle, almost like a cinematic Western in its approach. Games developers often throw in as much eye candy as humanly possible into their early presentations because they assume games journalists are stupid and only respond to the loudest and most blatant stimuli. And I honestly hope that this is the case here and that, as it was in the earlier games, the absolutely stupid big guns only come out in the end-game.

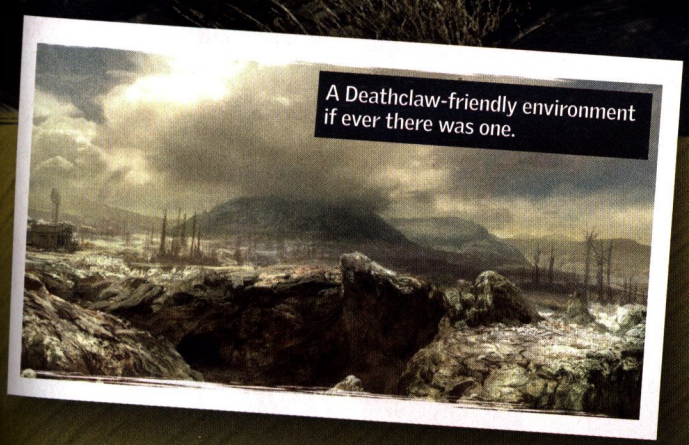
The same stand-off between spectacle and subtlety is perhaps true of the BIG DECISION laid forth with Megaton – essentially choosing whether or not to vaporise it. Megaton itself is a lovingly constructed little area – a place which, having had my threat level assessed by robot law-enforcer Deputy Weld, opened itself up through the machinations of an ancient airplane engine and fuselage.

Here, happy cult members (helpfully indicated by a direction sign marked 'Local Cult') worship an unexploded bomb, while townspeople go about their business – all of whom seem to have similar voice-actors to *Oblivion* by the way, even if they are far more expressive in looks, sounds and motion this time. Oh, and I'm sure that Megaton Sheriff looks just like one of Cyrodiil's Redguard guard models.

WHICH TO CHOOSE...

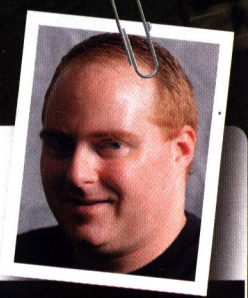
But let's not drown ourselves in little details – we're talking life or death here. Radio-detonate the bomb at the behest of a stranger and watch the pretty mushroom cloud, or dob in the bastard to the local constabulary. Or just kill him and blow it up anyway? The choice, as they say, is yours! It's this kind of final decision-making, actions after which there is no going back, that are key to *Fallout 3* – and indeed, its




A Deathclaw-friendly environment if ever there was one.

Fannish inquisition

Lead designer Emil Pagliarulo answers the questions posed by our roving reporter...



Now I loved all the smut in *Fallout 2*, I was of a certain age, but I hear you guys aren't so keen...

"There are some people who say that making an 18-rated game, and especially making a *Fallout* one, should be about sleeping with the hooker, then waking up with the venereal disease. A lot of that stuff personally, to me, veers into being a 12-year-old dungeon master. Some of it feels right and some of it feels wrong – we're appealing to an adult audience and it's a tough call. I mean, once you have groin shots you're approaching a level of silliness that, if you're not careful, can pervade the whole game. We'd rather be really cautious about it, and add that stuff in gradually than say 'we're going to do this, and this and this!' and go completely overboard."

How about random encounters – are you including them too?

"For the first time we have a designer who's completely dedicated to our freeform stuff. So, in addition to the quests, we've got a lot more freeform sandbox gameplay. People you encounter out in the wasteland and more things you can do..."

So will you come across 'dungeon-y' bits, as you would in *Oblivion*?

"You'll be wandering through the wasteland and you'll see a few buildings and realise you're in an old town, and this town is infested with whatever creature. We have a lot of 'dungeon' types – an old factory, an old army base, an old school. It's a lot less of the old *Oblivion* 'going underground' thing though, although we still have some of that stuff too."

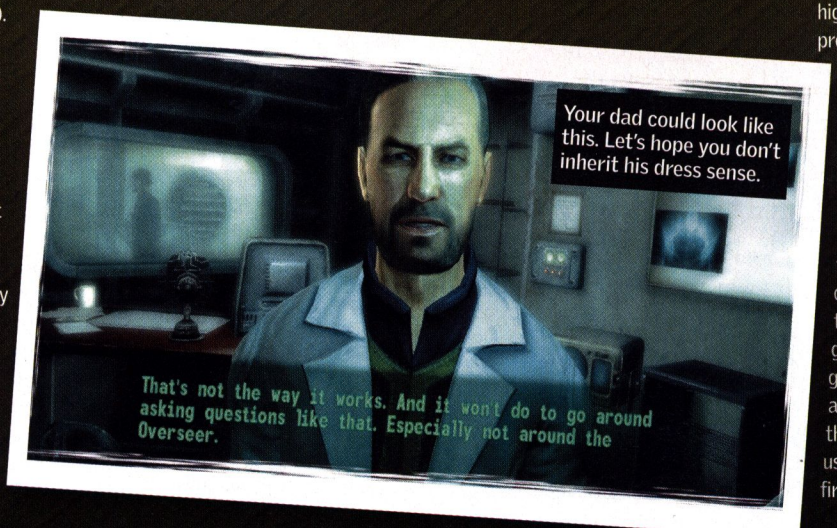
How about having a party? That was quite key to the old game...

"It's still very much a single-player, single-character game – but you do have companions. We're basing it on your karma, and different people will join you depending on what yours is – good, neutral or evil. You'll be able to talk to them to give them a basic set of parameters on how you want them to fight. And don't be surprised if a dog turns up somewhere..."

previous incarnations. The explosive format of the decision itself is a little extravagant for my tastes, but hey – at least it's there.

But what else haven't I told you yet? The neat hacking mini-game in which you spot words in a wall of computer code (far better than *BioShock's* effort, I reckon). The fact that drug addiction and jet abuse is still rife in the wastes. The delightful way in which a re-energised and rather officious underground-train bot will demand tickets from super-mutants ("tickets please!", "stupid robot!") before rating them as a 'threat level Omega' and blasting them into chunks. The return of the two-headed brahmin. The way your PIPBoy can play holodiscs just as it could before, and pick up radio stations to boot – a DJ on one of which can give you missions, then talk about you between songs. The fact that one of the bits of Washington DC you visit is called Chevy Chase. Is that a real bit of the American capital or Bethesda making a joke? It's funny either way.

Should you radio-detonate the bomb at the behest of a stranger, or dob in the bastard to the sheriff?



GET YOUR SHADES ON

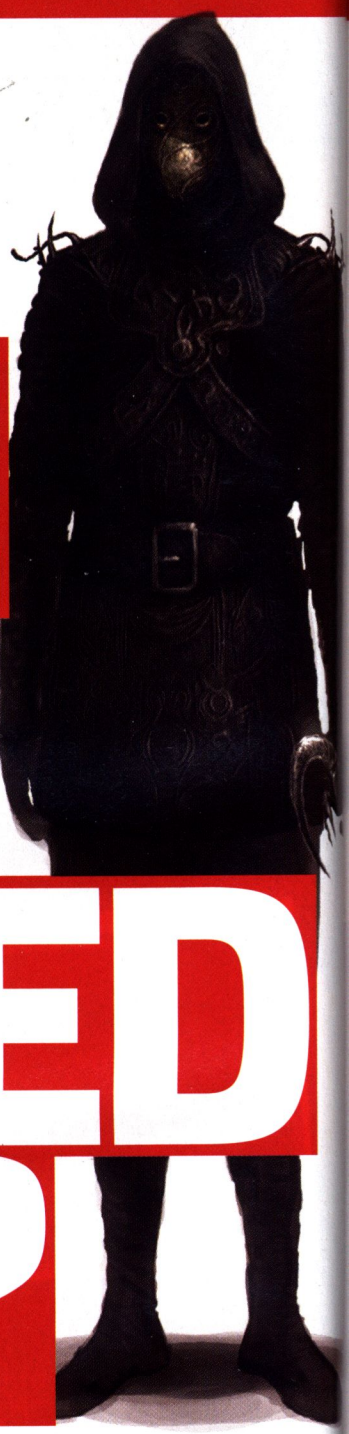
With solo role-playing now condensed by the required mega-budgets into rare high-impact releases, next year is looking pretty hot. With BioWare offering *Dragon Age* and (in all likelihood) *Mass Effect*, and Bethesda doing the Vault Boy dance come autumn, the stage is set for us to pump a huge amount of hours into fantasy, space and apocalyptic future alike.

Will the rubric of *Fallout 3* reach the depth that the fanboy inside me demands? It certainly has the potential to. It's a tried-and-tested stonker of a game concept, in the hands of some genuinely passionate people who have adopted the licence as if it were one of their own. The wasteland seems to want us back, and I for one can't wait for the first bomb to drop. PCZ





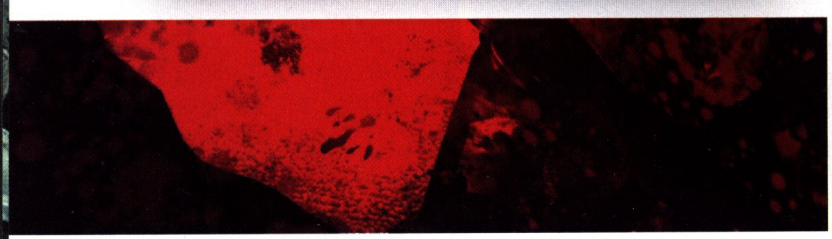




HAVE YOU MISSED OUT?!

The greatest gaming moments may have passed you by – *PC ZONE* fills in the gaps with our own nostalgic ramblings...

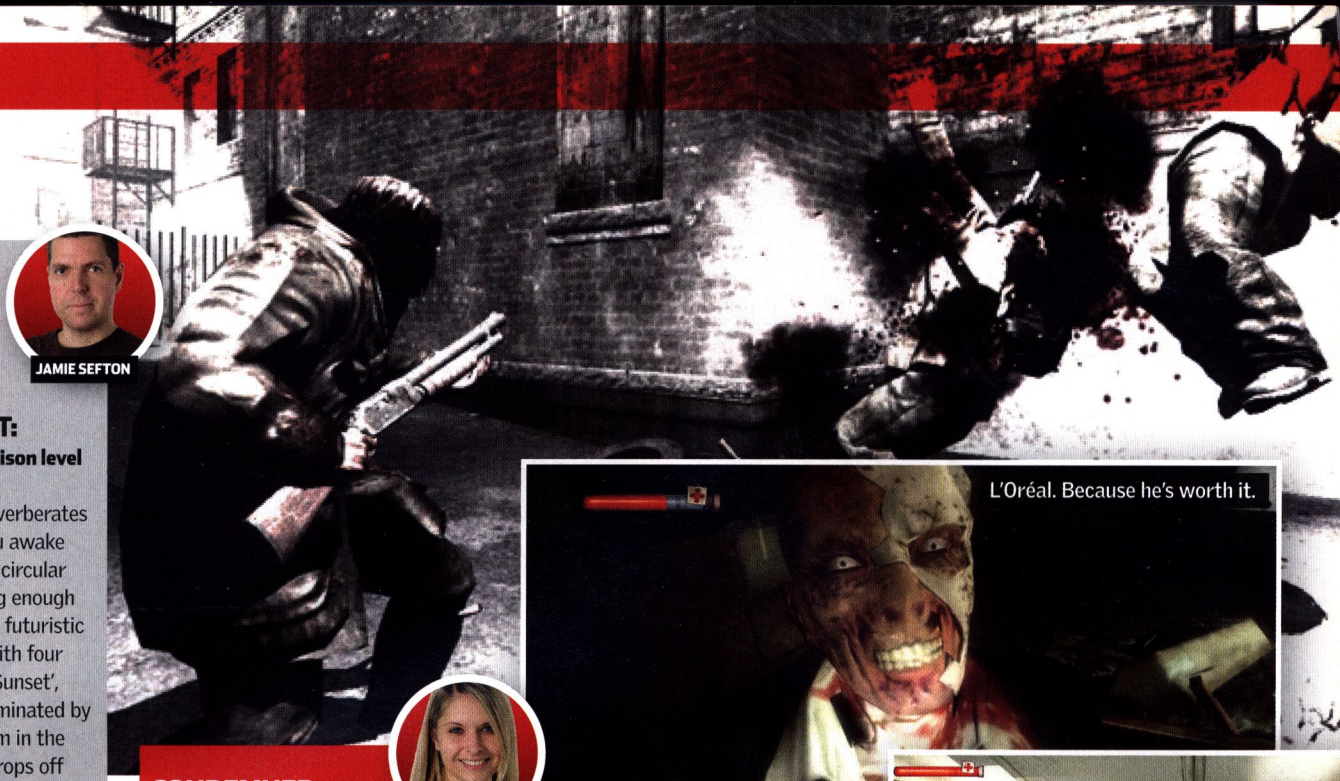
They are forgotten moments, personal moments – moments you'd tell your friends and family about around a roaring log fire



WE'VE DONE A 'best gaming moments' feature before, and it was miles better than any other 'best gaming moments' piece you could have read elsewhere (if we do say so ourselves). But it was after a lengthy pub conversation that we stumbled across a strange *new* seam of game moments, so good we felt they deserved an article all of their own.

These moments are special, in that their greatness never made any real impact in 'best gaming moments' features the world over. They are forgotten moments, personal moments – moments that you'd tell your friends and family about around a roaring log fire, while you rocked gently back and forth in your chair. These are the personal moments that make us unique; without them, we'd be nothing but husks of meat, fit only for use as batteries and food by an aggressive alien race.

Here then are our most private gaming moments, our most intimate memories, and those things that made us feel like we were alone in the world. The stuff that made us feel special. We're not just talking about that bit in *Duke Nukem 3D* where you walk in on the alien having a shit, either – everybody's seen that. We're on about bits of games that we all loved but never really spoke about. The ones that instantly dissolved into the disused parts of our cerebra, the ones we have to properly explain because everybody seems to have forgotten they happened. These are gaming's semi-forgotten triumphs, and we're ready to sing their praises...



THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

JAMIE SEFTON

STANDOUT MOMENT:

The triple-max security prison level

"Cold storage for cons," reverberates Riddick's gruff voice as you awake from cryo-sleep in a white circular techno-chamber, hardly big enough to swing a robotic cat. The futuristic prison yard is decorated with four calming words – 'Ocean', 'Sunset', 'Tree' and 'Flow', and is dominated by an ominous mechanical arm in the centre that picks up and drops off prisoners from their cryo coffins.

I love this bizarre level in *Escape From Butcher Bay* – it jolts you out of your shooter comfort zone and into a waking nightmare, where you're only permitted two minutes of exercise before the drugs kick in again and you collapse to the floor asleep for another day.

After trying different things in your *Groundhog Day* window of consciousness, such as hitting the other prisoners you exercise with (you're quickly executed if you do that), you eventually hit on a plan. To escape, you have to hide in the other prisoner's cryo box just before the robo-grabber drops their lifeless body into it, then quickly push them onto the floor, allowing you to be transported to freedom. Well, to the Mech-guarded Cryo Pyramid storage facility in the next level anyway. Ingenious stuff.



SUZY WALLACE

CONDEMNED: CRIMINAL ORIGINS

STANDOUT MOMENT:

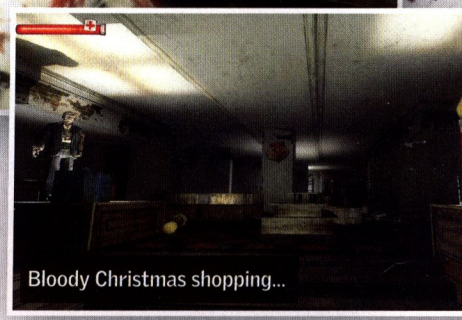
The shopping mall and its freaky mannequin inhabitants

Contrary to gender stereotypes, I detest shopping. So when my entrance to a run-down shopping centre is greeted by a blood-stained Christmas tree, eerie festive music being piped through the speakers and creepy mannequins adorning broken displays, I know things aren't going to turn out well.

After a period of sound effects which get my nerves jangling, and fleeting glimpses of what appears to be the store mannequins running past my peripheral vision, I eventually round a corner only to be confronted by another mannequin. Only this one's most definitely not static and appears intent on killing me. Disturbingly, when I head-butt it, the plastic face falls away to reveal flesh underneath.

It's just one of the many superbly designed set-pieces in a game that builds levels of tension like none I've ever experienced before. And it's all complemented by some of the most atmospheric sound effects you're ever likely to hear in a game.

Bizarrely, *Condemned* never seemed to make much of a splash on PC, and thanks to this scene being just over halfway through, some people just didn't make it that far. What they missed out on is, much like the rest of the game, a master class in tension created through creepy level design and haunting sound effects. Not to be missed.



HAVE YOU MISSED OUT?





WILL PORTER

PAINKILLER

STANDOUT MOMENT:

The very last level, in the lowest pits of hell...

Not many people got to the end of *Painkiller*. It's not a bad game, just a very long game that doesn't change much as you plough through it. As much fun as it is nailing a screaming zombie's ragdoll body to a wall, there certainly isn't much impetus to finish the whole damn thing. Which is a shame, since it means that so few people have experienced the out-and-out insanity of its closing level.

The premise is that we're in the very depths of hell and about to face off against the cataclysmic big-bad that is Lucifer – itself quite an anticlimactic boss battle – when he actually turns up and needs smiting. But the dark one lives in an amazingly produced freeze-frame panorama of warfare: medieval arrows hang suspended in the air, smashed bricks and mortar hang before you as they explode from the sides of WWI trenches, an upended warship is captured at its most vertical moment before slowly plunging into the waters below...

After such an intense game, it's a strange and vaguely haunting level, with odd ambient sounds of battle resonating around each area – an atmosphere only mildly spoiled by a gang of rubbish ghost monsters you're expected to mow down.

Towering over the entire level, meanwhile, is a nuclear mushroom cloud frozen in time, with chunks of masonry and fire being hurled from it in every direction. Today, the graphics may not be as amazing as they once were – but for being so utterly unexpected, as well as so historically underappreciated, this level earns a little corner of my gaming heart.

HAVE YOU MISSED OUT?

FINAL FANTASY VII



JON 'LOG' BLYTH

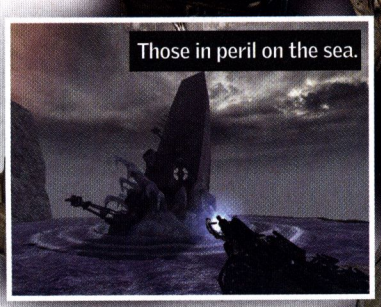
STANDOUT MOMENT:

Killing Emerald Weapon, which was extremely hard

I'm slow to get involved these days, but *Final Fantasy VII* was the first game of its type I'd ever played. Hypnotised by the pace and progression, I played it straight through in under 70 hours, never really getting too involved with the side-quests. I loved *FF7*. This was my happy time.

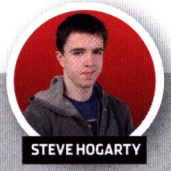
When I found out I'd missed out on two playable characters, all the best weapons and near-impossible bosses, I did what any genuinely stupid person would do: I bought the walkthrough book and played it through again. Every side-quest was angrily explored. I press-ganged Vincent and Yuffie to join my team. I explored wrecked ships and I reared a golden chocobo, just to visit some old fart in a cave. I was going to suck every venomous drop out of this infuriating game, but there wasn't a moment when I ever considered the importance of enjoying myself. This was my furious time.

The last thing I did, before entering the final crater, was fight Emerald Weapon. The toughest boss in the game, my preparations and power-gathering had taken well over 100 hours. I beat that shit, and I'm one of the only people who bothered to do it – but I was an automaton, a non-player playing a semi-game, following the instructions of an official guide. Was it any less of a victory for that? My Earth Harp says not, losers.



Those in peril on the sea.

We can still picture the curator opening up in the morning to find an empty museum and a dozen unconscious guards...



STEVE HOGARTY

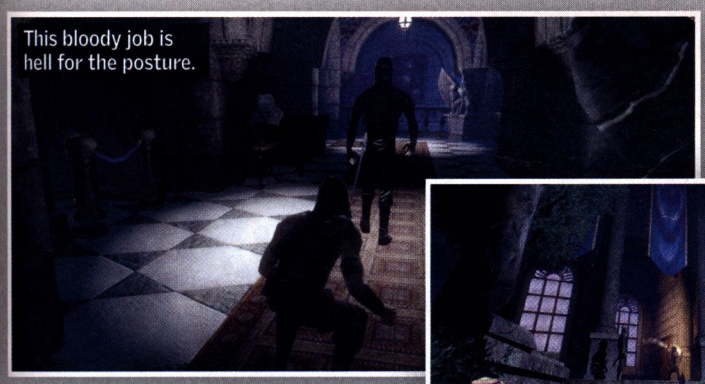
THIEF: DEADLY SHADOWS

STANDOUT MOMENT:

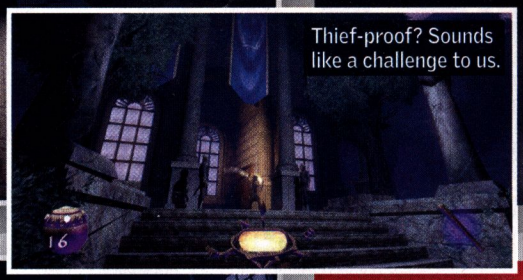
Cleaning out what was believed to be a thief-proof museum

Ask anybody to name their favourite moment from *Thief: Deadly Shadows* and they'll blub the words: "The Cradle, boo-hoo-hoo, I was so scared. You know you don't even see that many monsters in it but it was still scary, how amazing is that?" Well, I think due attention hasn't been paid to one of the final levels in Ion Storm's sneaky thievery game – the one in which you completely clean out Wieldstrom Museum. Throughout the game, snippets of information about the museum are dropped, specifically about how the architect continually boasts of its security. The headlines read: "Museum proves thief-proof. Would-be thieves dead." This is more vault than museum, and it's full of the greatest and most valuable treasures the game has to offer. And being the master thief you are, you're going to do more than just pocket an ancient coin or two – you're going to swipe anything that's not nailed down with really big nails. We can still picture the curator opening up in the morning to find an empty museum and a dozen unconscious guards who have no idea where all the shiny things have gone. There's no other point in the game that makes you feel like the first noun in the game's title more than this level does.

HAVE YOU MISSED OUT?



This bloody job is hell for the posture.



Thief-proof? Sounds like a challenge to us.



I'm sure that statue just moved...



"Uh-oh. Did I turn my mobile off...?"



MARTIN KORDA

ALIENS VS PREDATOR 2

STANDOUT MOMENT:

Face Hugger and Baby Alien levels

HAVE YOU MISSED OUT?

It seems that my eulogising about Monolith's thrilling fright-fest knows no bounds. However, breaking with tradition, I'm not even going to mention the stunning, terrifying Marine campaign or the brilliant Predator vs Marine multiplayer games. Apart from the fact I just have. Damn! OK, starting again from... Now.

Lurking in one of the game's dingier corners was a very confusing Alien campaign that comprised crawling through vents and becoming totally disorientated by your wall-walking abilities. However, before it all got, well, a bit crap, there came two of the most original FPS levels you're ever likely to play.

The first one cast you in the scuttling role of a Face Hugger, looking for a victim to jump on and impregnate. But that was just for starters. It's what came next that was the true moment of genius. Encased in a crimson cell with a heartbeat resounding through your headphones and unable to move, you'd slowly start to realise where you were. Hammering the fire button, you'd begin hacking through ribs, cartilage and skin, bursting into the world to be greeted by the dying gasps of the security guard whose chest you'd just smashed open. Oh, and if memory serves, you also got to kill a cat and watch your little alien teeth chomp with your internal eyes. Brilliant! PCZ

BRITAIN'S BEST PC GAMES MAG

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Our verdict on the latest



62 BIOSHOCK

It's time to find out if Irrational's water baby will sink or swim...

Lucky shot

MY FIRST EXPERIENCE of the FPS genre put me off for years. It was playing *Quake III* one day at uni. Against people who played it all the time. Who knew the maps inside out. Who could rocket jump. Needless to say, my experience of it went as follows: spawn, get shot, die. Repeat. And repeat. And repeat again until 'FPS = bad' was cemented in my mind.

Now fast-forward six years. Despite having grown fond of FPS games, I've still never got on with the world's most popular online shooter. Yep, *Counter-Strike*. When the last Fight Club saw us playing it again, with my frustration levels rising, I noted down the following comments: "I hate this game. It's the epitome of everything I always hated about FPS games. I don't know the maps, I don't know how to identify who's on my side and I keep getting shot before I even know someone's there. I'd rather pull out my toenails." Then, all of a sudden, the clouds parted, the god of shooters smiled on me and I went on to have the best couple of rounds I'd ever had. Funny how things work out...

Suzy Wallace

Suzy Wallace, reviews editor

Must Buys!

***PC ZONE* Classics are our highest award, with only the best games deemed worthy of the honour. These are our personal top tips for sheer gaming excellence...**

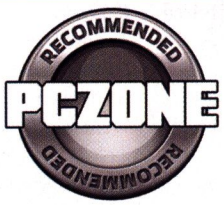


HL2: Ep One Company Of Heroes Oblivion

The PC ZONE Awards



CLASSIC (90%+)
The best games ever. If you're lucky enough to see one, stop and buy it.



RECOMMENDED (75-89%)
Pretty, pretty, pretty. Any game that turns *ZONE*'s head is worthy of your love.



DUMP (0-19%)
Don't shirk your duty – it's the only responsible thing to do to a game like this.

AND THE REST



ONLINE ONLY
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See this and you're going to have to own the original to play the expansion. We know – life's not fair.



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The PC ZONE gaming machine



As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games super-whizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C2D, (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, tap into the wonder that is the Internet and type the following selection of letters into your browser: www.xworksinteractive.com.

ALSO REVIEWED

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MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE

PCZONE ON THE DVD

Medal Of Honor needs you! Or at least, it needs a 'u', tuts *Jon Blyth*, before taking another dainty sip of Darjeeling...

DEVELOPER EA
PUBLISHER EA
WEBSITE www.ea.com/moh/airborne
ETA September 7
PRICE £34.99

RECOMMENDED PCZONE

HI. I'M A Nazi. I'm currently fighting in World War II, which will look ace on my CV. We had a hell of a time deciding what to call this war. Some people said we should build on the 'Great War' franchise, and call it 'Another Great War'.

It had a jolly ring to it, I thought, but then Officer Schneider told me that we were the baddies, and we had no place being jolly. I don't listen to Schneider, much. He's such an old-school baddy, always clacking the heels of his boots together, like he's trying to get back to Kansas. As this is 1943, I have no idea why I said that.

Anyway, there are these guys coming down in parachutes, and because we're at war, I suggested to my nefarious colleagues that we should probably kill or torture them, because they looked like good guys. Everyone agreed, and decided to hide around the town. We saw where the stupid goodies were landing, and ran to hide behind some stuff. Schneider calls it 'taking cover', but I think 'hiding' sounds a bit more evil. Now, I love killing people with machine guns, so I ran for the machine-gun outpost. Stupid Klaus was running for it too and got there first, though. After turning back, I see that most of the nearby cover is taken, so I think bollocks to it, I'll run at the enemy. Not much else to do, reall... hey, brilliant! Klaus got shot in the head! Right, I'm running back to the machine gun before anyone else bagsies it.

OUT OF CHARACTER

Hi. I'm the reviewer, and that was a dramatisation of a scene I played in *Medal Of Honor: Airborne*. I wrote it from the point of view of a Nazi soldier for two reasons: first, because this review counts as part of my GCSE English course work. Second, because I saw it happen, and I enjoyed watching the AI make that kind of decision. Anyway, *Airborne* is here to rescue the *MOH* series from endlessly repeating history, and to try and kick the iconic – but flagging – franchise up the arse.

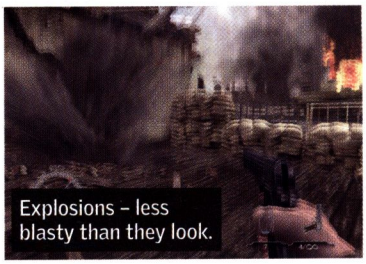
The main innovation in *Airborne*, and the one most obvious from the title, is that you play Boyd Travers, a paratrooper in the US Airborne Division. The tactic of dropping soldiers into enemy territory from planes was a new one for the '40s, and it's one of those ideas that – once heard – you're surprised nobody has converted into a game before (well, not for a few years anyway). So, after an unskippable but extremely short tutorial, that's exactly what you'll be doing. Incidentally, the tutorial focuses on the novel aspects of the game. A basic knowledge of games is taken as read. Lessons appear to have been learned from *Pacific Assault* here.

With this first innovation came a necessary second. Because you can drop in anywhere on the map, the AI required the capacity to deal with a foe that wasn't guaranteed to approach from one end of a corridor. So NPCs – both allies and enemies – respond purely to their surroundings, as affected by your presence. When the game was doing its initial rounds of first-looks and hands-ons, the word 'affordance' was bandied around. Even then it sounded a little bit like a catchy repackaging of common sense, but it goes like this.

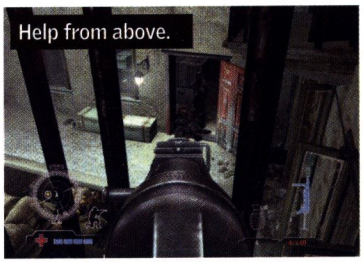
Everything in the game environment has a value, either positive or negative. A small chair will have a small positive value. Hiding behind a tank will be safer, and more appealing, so will have a much higher value. A grenade appearing between your feet will have a high, and negative, impact on the desirability of your location. Like I said, it's an attempt to translate common sense into numbers, and as satisfying as it is to throw a grenade over a sofa and flush the Nazis out into the path of your SMG, in this day and age we'd be justified in putting our tongue in front of our bottom teeth and going "durrrr" for three minutes if it didn't happen this way.

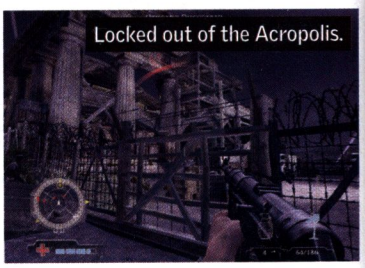
The routes the enemies take is sometimes cool – they can leap out of windows as well as over upturned desks –


No use signalling for Batman now, Nazi scum!


Explosions – less blasty than they look.


Take cover, or die.


Help from above.


Locked out of the Acropolis.

AT A GLANCE...

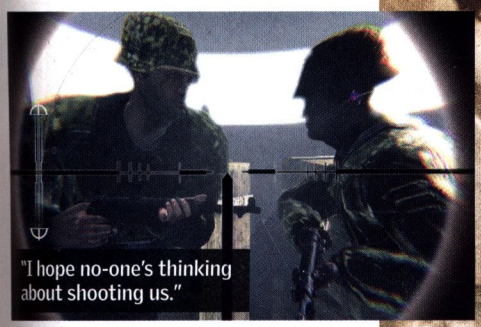
A shot in the arm for the struggling *Medal Of Honor* series – you now get to land wherever you want.

Minimum system requirements:
2.8GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

CALL OF DUTY 2	91%
MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE	83%
MEDAL OF HONOR: PACIFIC ASSAULT	79%

A grenade appearing between your feet will have a high, and negative, impact on the desirability of your location



"I hope no-one's thinking about shooting us."



Delicious Gammon grenades, served with fried flesh.

but the important point seems to be that this intelligence is map-wide. Once you've cleared an area of objectives, you'll find the enemies you were fighting disappear pretty quickly. It seems like they were only there to fight you off, and once you've done your job, the remaining enemy run off to defend the next objective. It gives you a welcome moment of respite, and feels, if not realistic, then at least somehow justified.

GUNS AND PIXELS

Pardon me for sounding like a hippy, but *Airborne* is in a strange graphical place. The locations are lovely, and you'll never see a nicer scaffolding around an Acropolis, but the character models have a dated air about them. They're just on the right side of acceptable now, but in couple of years, I daresay we'll be squinting at them and wincing. Despite this, the game's a demanding one for machines with lesser graphics cards



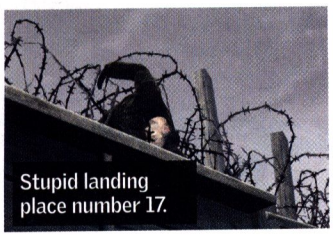
Classic gunning locations: clock tower.



Typical – finish the mission, and reinforcements arrive.


This can only end badly for one of us.


Sniping is fast enough to be fun at ground level too.


Stupid landing place number 17.

and tight RAM (it's 1GB minimum), and if you're using SLI you might find performance actually improves by turning it off.

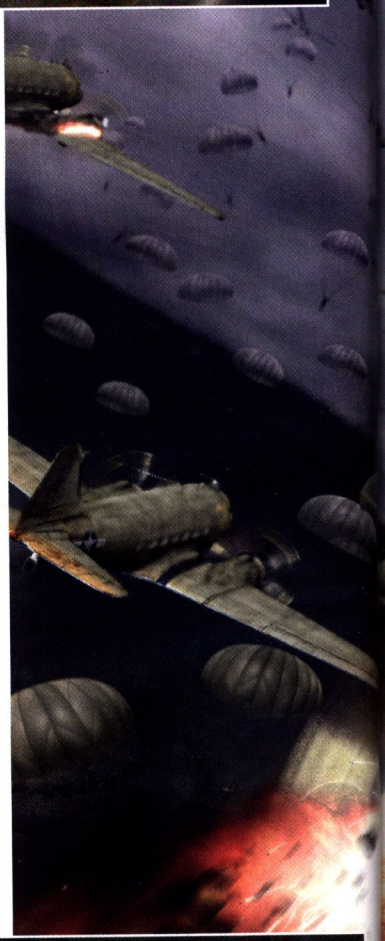
You start with a small collection of rifles, machine pistols and so on, from which you can load out two at the start of each level. You can unlock the other weapons by finding them in-game, from which point they'll be available in your loadout screen at the beginning of new operations.

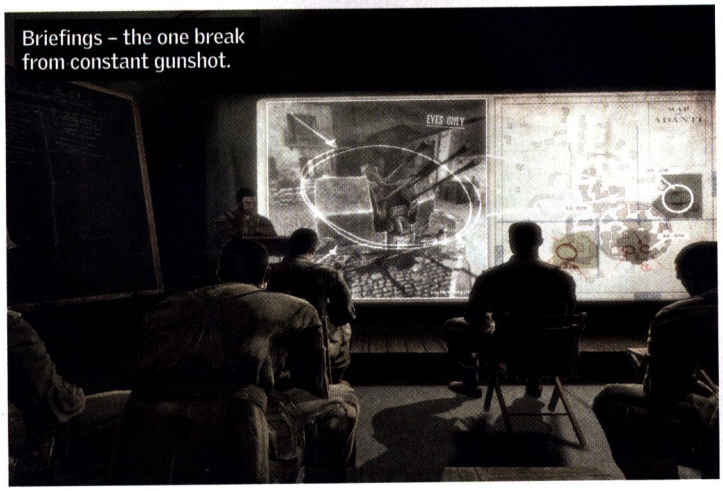
New to *Airborne* is the weapons upgrade system. Each of the 13 weapons has three upgrades, and just using a weapon increases its experience meter. Puncturing three or five bad guys in quick succession boosts it even faster. When this XP gauge fills up, you'll be rewarded with five seconds of slo-mo while you get told what's happened to your gun. Upgrades include the obvious – less recoil, higher ammo capacity, higher damage and accuracy – to more unexpected bonuses. The German G43 rifle undergoes perhaps the most radical transformation. Its second upgrade is a variable zoom scope, allowing a touch of sniping, while its final upgrade allows you to fire grenades. This is particularly cool in multiplayer mode where the grenades aren't so underpowered – although upgrades aren't earned in MP, they're either on or off.

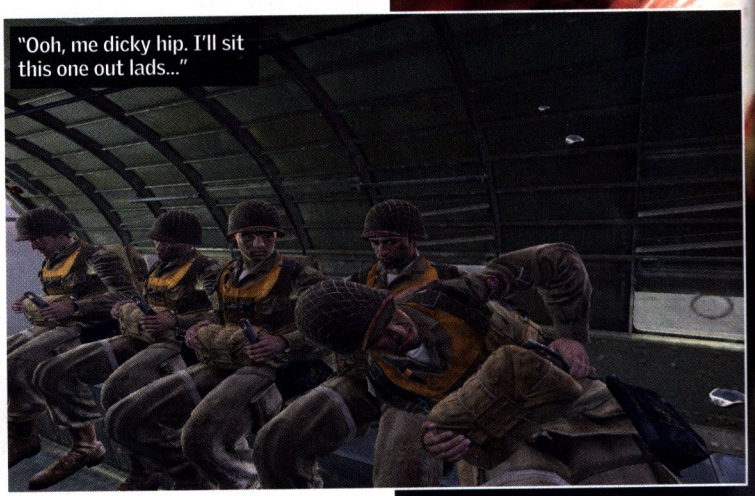

This 'cover' lark works both ways...

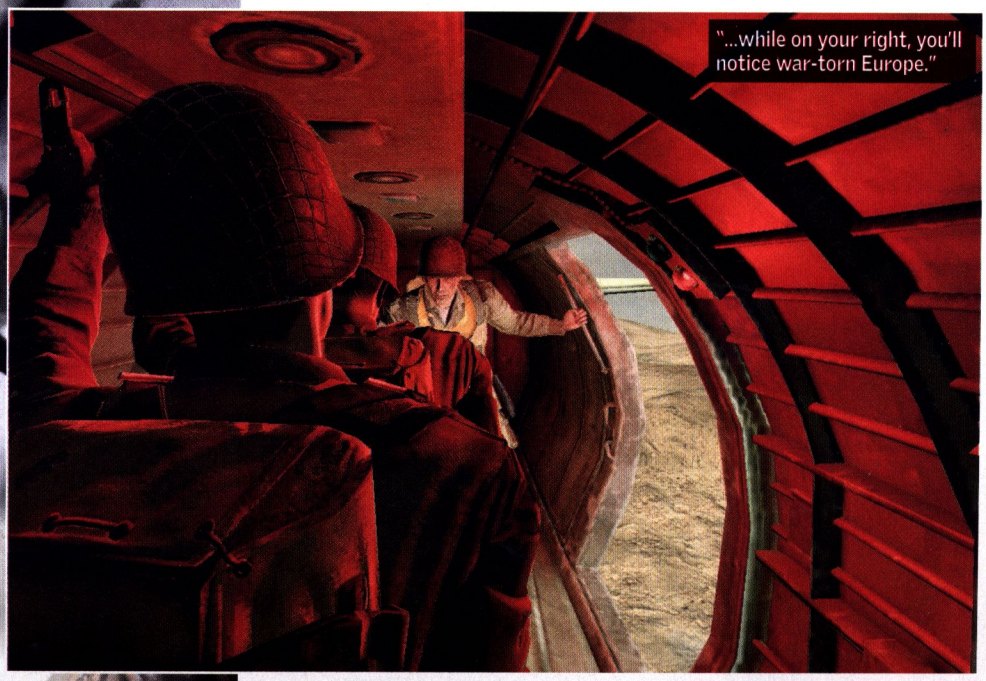
MISSION ACCOMPLISHED

Back to the gameplay, then. Your first drop is in Operation Husky, which takes place in the town of Adanti, Italy. You'll be cutting your teeth on some delightfully easy-to-kill Italians, so don't panic when you're faced with your first decision about where to land. Make your choices. There are four anti-aircraft guns that need taking out. They'll be heavily guarded. But by Italians. If you obediently follow the tutorial, you'll land by the green flares. There's little to no enemy presence there, often a box of ammo, and




Briefings – the one break from constant gunshot.

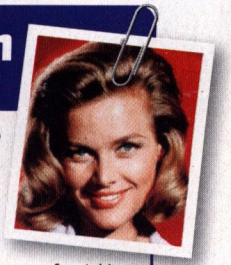

"Ooh, me dicky hip. I'll sit this one out lads..."



"...while on your right, you'll notice war-torn Europe."

Medal of Honor Blackman

The most prized prize of combat gaming ever



Hi, I'm Honor Blackman, aka Pussy Galore from *Goldfinger*, and I'm here to award my sexy geriatric medal to the best *Medal Of Honor* game so far.

Falling behind a little, we've got *MOH: Pacific Assault*, which had some lovely moments but, for my delightfully upper-crust money, laboured under a terrible lack of overt thrills. *Airborne* is more immediately engaging to me, Honor Blackman, and has more interesting weaponry and gameplay than the original. However, *Allied Assault* had those wonderful scenes of watching your friends get gunned down on the beach. It was as almost as iconic as I am. *Airborne* has similarly affecting scenes in the belly of the airplane, but nothing quite to match that 'ooh, I've shit me frillies' moment that had me shitting my frillies non-stop in *Allied Assault*.

I'm afraid the 'Medal of Honor Blackman' still goes to the first game, but I'll be pinning a consolation medal of loveliness on *Airborne* later tonight, in my private quarters. Bring a bottle, boys! I may be 79, but I'm mucky as you like.

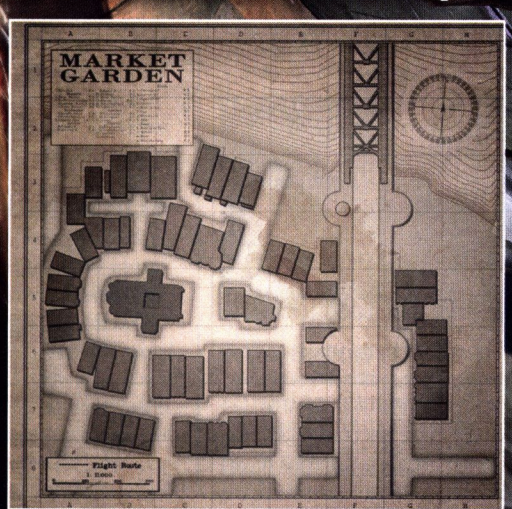
That's all very well if you're some kinda chicken-shit liver-pussy, or whatever an American would say

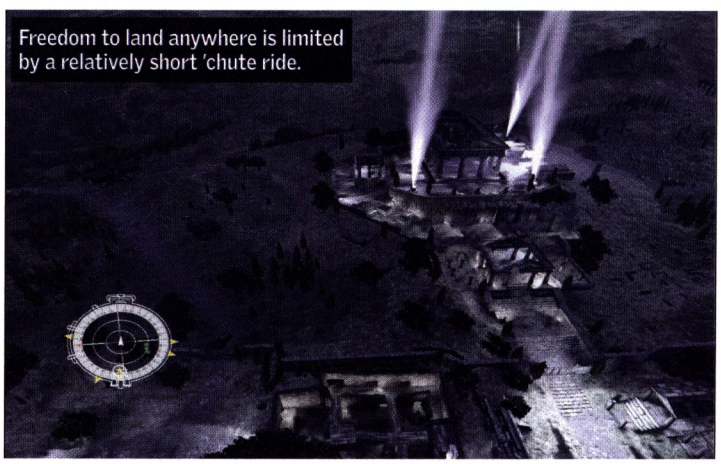
these places are where the rest of your regiment will be landing. You can then work your way to the objectives as a team, using your squad as meaty decoys.

That's all very well if you're some kinda chicken-shit liver-pussy, or whatever a proper American would say. The true heroes among us – the brave, the reckless and those who are aware that this is a game, and you don't actually die in real life – will drop into the thick of the action. Your options are only limited by the landing range of your parachute, and your ability to land well – if you aim for the town hall roof and botch the landing, you'll be shot down before you even get your gun out.

If you've got the Springfield sniper rifle, of course, you might like to land on a rooftop and pick off a few of the fascists before you work out how to get down and pistol-whip the rest. Alternatively, you might like to sail through a window, just to see who's in there and if they're surprised to see you. Or you could go for completion and seek out the five difficult skill drops dotted around each operation.

The six campaigns take you through a decent variety of





Freedom to land anywhere is limited by a relatively short 'chute ride.

If you're thinking that every game you play will be miraculously different, you'll be disappointed 8

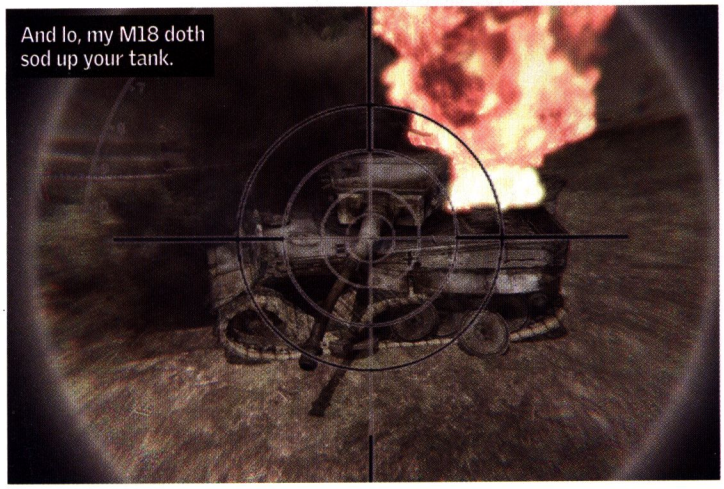
AI man

***Airborne's* enemies are (mostly) a very sensible bunch**

Airborne's AI, on which so much of the game hinges, is largely sensible and often convincing. There are times, however, when it shines, and others when it flounders. One of my favourite incidents took place while taking cover behind a box. Focused on a distant target, I leaned out of cover to take a potshot. Meanwhile, an enemy soldier chose the same time to lean out from the other side of the box. We both immediately hid again. I laughed at the cartoonishness of it all, before his grenade blew me up. A less impressive, but equally happy moment was the Tiger tank that obligingly ran over a soldier I was engaging. I spent the next 15 minutes trying to recreate the scene, to no avail. Still, I swear it happened. If you want to be entertained, the AI will do that – whether by solid performance, strokes of genius or the occasional erratic glitch.


Affordance this!


Another heroic rearguard action.


And lo, my M18 doth sod up your tank.

locations, each with a different feel. Operation Avalanche takes you to some ruins, and what feels like an excavation site. The third operation is spread across some farmland, trenches and coastal pill-boxes more evocative of other WWII games. In Operation Market Garden you'll be running from one broken house to another, in a ring of pretty demolition.

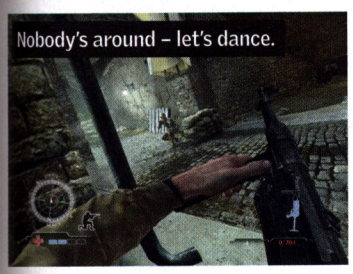
The openness of your options and the freedom of the AI to retaliate as it sees fit both work well, but if you're thinking that every game you play will be miraculously different from start to finish, you'll be disappointed. Cover points and machine gun encampments are obvious, and the AI will take advantage of them in predictable ways. For example, once you learn that the AI *really* likes manning those MG outposts, you can sit and snipe his head out, knowing that another one will be there to take his place soon enough. It's a case of making the game boring for yourself on purpose, and you kinda wish that 'large pile of your friends' corpses' would act as a more powerfully negative affordance for your Nazi foes.

BLIND SHAFT

In a way, the structure of each mission is shaped like an old-fashioned mercury thermometer (the cartoon type with a big bulb at the end). Each level has an initial group of missions – the initial mercurial bulb if you will – which can be completed in any order. If you die at this time, you'll be given the chance to drop in again, and guide yourself to another more appropriate place. However, in what feels like a strong



Not a great time to have to reload.



Nobody's around – let's dance.

compromise of the game's freeform approach, once you've completed these missions, your spawn point becomes fixed, and you're off down the corridor-like shaft of the thermometer. You'll often still have a number of paths available, but it suddenly becomes linear again. The split is about 50/50, and it's most noticeable in the Market Garden level (once you get to the bridge).

It's tough, with Panzerschrecks firing rockets about like it's Christmas at the Boom-Time Chapel of Bangalang, and doesn't really feel like the same game – but it's still an entertaining section, so I can't bitch too hard about it. Oh, and if you thought the thermometer analogy was tenuous, give me a break. You don't know how hard it was not to slip in a similar, and amusing, metaphor about male genitals.

One final criticism that has to be made about *Airborne* is that it's short. The six campaigns will take under ten hours to complete. Some replay value is gained from playing the levels in different ways – that's the main point of it, after all – and the multiplayer is reassuringly strong. The weapons are more balanced than previous *MOH* outings, and there's a reprise of the Destroyed Village map for the fans of *Allied Assault*. The multiplayer also gives you the option of letting the Allies 'chute in – only this time, the Nazis are able to gun you down in mid-air if you try to land too close. The multiplayer is a lot of fun, especially with weapons upgrades turned on. It has to be said, without the multiplayer, *Airborne* might have felt a lot less substantial.

YOU HAVE TO WORK IT

With all this talk of innovation, it's easy to lose sight of what *MOH: Airborne* still, fundamentally, is: a (mostly) traditional first-person shooter. It's an FPS with aspirations of unscripted freeform play, but these things are a twist on, rather than a fundamental revision of the genre – and the nature of the AI means that a lot of similar situations will recur no matter where you land. In a sense, *Airborne* gives you back what you put into it – it rewards a determination to enjoy what it has to offer. But equally, the game's finer moments could easily pass people by. PCZ

Landing decisions

You've been given freedom – how will you use it?



GREEN ZONES

"Nice and safe. What are you, some kind of Thailand ladyboy? You tucked your maggot 'tween yo' legs? Get out there and don't come back till you've shot off some Nazi hats, soldier!"



ROOFTOPS

"You're one sneaky Pete, son. I shouldn't wonder if you don't hide under yo' duvet to get out of doing the washing up. Nobody likes washing cutlery, son, but it has to be done!"



SKILL DROP

"Look at Fancy Nancy with her skill drops! You want me to plump a velvet cushion for you? You want me to solve aristocratic mysteries with you? Do you want me to be played by Stephen Fry, soldier?"



IN THE THICK OF IT

"You're either dumb as a goose or wily as a heron, boy! You must really like shooting off Nazi hats. You remind me of me, if I was some kind of dumb-ass no-nuts with a stupid face."



I never expected to be shooting Bez...



You're not given any info about your friends – lucky, as they die a lot.

PCZONE

Graphics	Occasionally gorgeous, but curiously old-school characters
Sound	Constant battle, with moments of musical emotion
Multiplayer	Great meld of old *Medal Of Honor* and *Airborne* features

- ✓ Innovations are interesting, and they work
- ✓ Rewards effort and experimentation
- ✓ Fun multiplayer experience
- ✗ Short single-player campaign
- ✗ Not always the prettiest

83

First person 'chuter



BIOSHOCK

Steve Hogarty takes a deep breath and dives into the murky depths...

DEVELOPER Irrational Games
PUBLISHER 2K Games
WEBSITE www.bioshockgame.com
ETA August 24
PRICE £34.99

PCZONE ON THE DVD

AT A GLANCE...

A dilapidated underwater utopia slowly being reclaimed by the sea harbours dark secrets and a sinister history. Thrown in at the deep end, you must use your strength, weapons and smarts to stay alive. Yay!

Minimum system requirements: 2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a 128MB graphics card (along with an internet connection).

HOW IT STACKS

BIOSHOCK	96%
SYSTEM SHOCK 2	95%
DEUS EX	94%

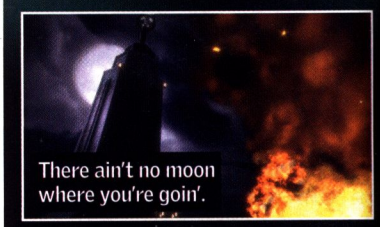
RAPTURE IS AN underwater city, an idealistic utopia that one man had enough money and power to make into a big brass reality. Rapture is a haven for the Earth's intellectuals, her artists, her athletes, her scientists. It's an art-deco paradise, a slice of mid-20th century American glamour placed on the floor of the Atlantic. Rapture is a place untouched by capitalism, communism or altruism. It's a place where a man's virtues are in his own skills and not the skills of his peers, where the needy are deemed parasitic, where life is perfect. In the words of its creator, Andrew Ryan: "It was not impossible to build Rapture at the bottom of the ocean – it was impossible to build it anywhere else."

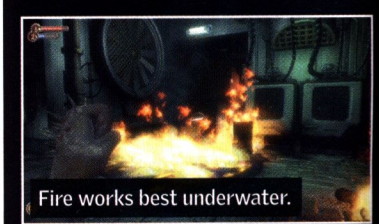
Isn't that clever? Games rarely credit their players with this much intelligence, and this is only the outset of the story too. The collective genius of Irrational has spawned something amazing, something more intriguing than perhaps any other game we've come across. *BioShock* has so much depth, and not just because it has a complex, mature storyline that touches on various philosophies, politics and the notions of ego and free will, but also by having so many implicit layers of exposition.

What I mean is, you can play *BioShock* without caring about the characters within Rapture. You can ignore the carefully woven series of events that have led to its downfall. You can merrily wade through the enemies, never let the word 'existentialism' cross your mind, treat the game like a shooter and enjoy yourself at a very base level. But then, you could take your time. You could search for the portentous audio diaries scattered throughout the city, discover the meaning behind every facet of the game, and come out the other side with a proper understanding of the beautiful world in which the game is set, and the characters that populate it, or once did.

NOVEL GAMEPLAY

When you finish playing *BioShock*, and you've played it properly by becoming engrossed in the whole thing, you come away feeling like you've just read a great novel. A novel that you were truly a part of, and one that made you feel things games generally don't tend to make you feel. Play *BioShock* and you'll feel scared, you'll feel disgusted, amused, shocked and thrilled. It is every inch a masterpiece, a finely polished experience, something people might point to when they're going off on one about games being an unappreciated art form. It's all very good. It's as good as all the previews made


There ain't no moon where you're goin'.


Fire works best underwater.

When you finish playing, you come away feeling like you've just read a really great novel



"No you can't have the McNugget meal!"

A Big Daddy takes on the arboretum's security bots.

Immolation isn't such a problem when you wear diving gear all day.

New Plasmids arrive with kooky retro movies.

it sound, and maybe even just a bit better. In fact, it's hard to say exactly why it's great without simply blubbing about the story and the characters before stopping, putting your hand to your mouth and saying: "Oops, can't tell you *that* – spoooilers!"

WHAT WENT WRONG

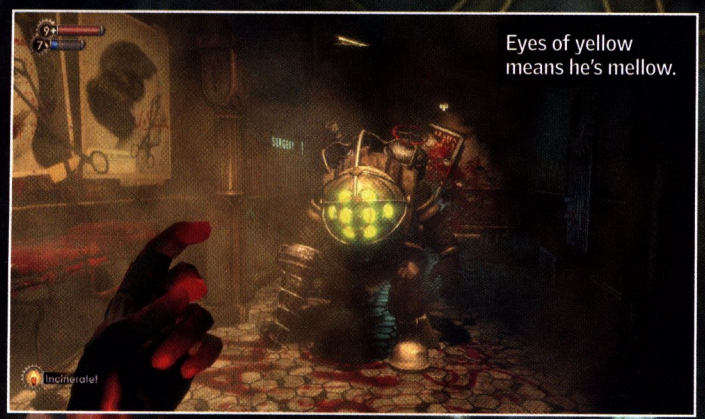
Simply put, Rapture went a bit cuckoo-bananas when a gene-altering slug was discovered and certain people began to profit from it. One mutated thing led to another, more mutated thing, and you find yourself arriving in the silent aftermath of a civil war, in the year 1960. The citizens, grotesquely disfigured by the constant reconfiguration of their DNA, and probably a bit embarrassed about the whole situation, skulk about the darkened hallways and bars, moaning to themselves, desperate and willing to kill for more of the gene-changing substance they crave. They wear, with unnerving humanity, fancy dress masks from the New Year's Eve party during which the fighting first broke out. Their plaintive cries, as with every




Big Daddies: not fireproof.


Eyes of green, he's not mean.

Buying the ability to shoot flames from your hand is as easy as buying condoms from a pub toilet





piece of audio in the game, are disturbingly well rendered. They're walking tragedies, each of them, and they form the bulk of what you'll be killing.

To defend yourself, you've got not just weapons but your own genetic abilities, called Plasmids. These work pretty much like magic spells (but they're not magic spells, let's be clear on this), and are bought from stations placed throughout Rapture – the whole gene-splicing business had become so commercialised in Rapture that buying the ability to shoot flames from your hand is as easy as buying amusingly flavoured condoms from a pub toilet.

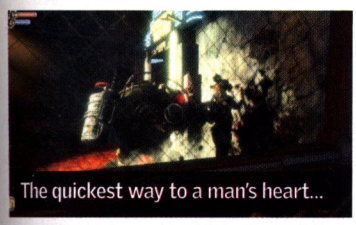
This division between weapons and Plasmids, and the ability to use the environment to your advantage in a fight, feels a lot like the fighting system of *Dark Messiah*, with right-clicking switching between the two modes. Use your 'Electro Bolt' Plasmid to electrify a pool of water, and watch paddling enemies fall down or become stunned long enough to be thumped with a wrench. Use your 'Incinerate!' Plasmid on some spilled oil and watch the flames spread. Use your 'Telekinesis' to catch explosives and hurl them at your foes. As the enemies get tougher, you have to make better use of your Plasmids and the surrounding environment.

UNDER PRESSURE

Rapture's own security system is one of the most powerful weapons in this environment, and coupled with Plasmids that can force enemies to turn on one another, you begin to realise how much scope for emergent combat is actually here – far more than in *Dark Messiah*, whose options didn't extend much further than kicking fleshy things into conveniently placed sharp things.

Security cameras, helpfully fitted with red spotlights to clearly indicate where they're pointing, set off alarm systems and release security bots – little flying gun turrets with helicopter blades, to hunt you down. Disable a bot with a blast of electricity and you can hack it, reprogramming it to follow you around and help you out. Or even better, hack the camera itself, and it'll spot




The quickest way to a man's heart...


This machine gun spells 'LOL'!


Eyes of red, and you've clearly pissed him off.

and send bots after any enemy that wanders into its field of view. Use your 'Winter Blast' Plasmid and the camera freezes, either giving you more time to hack it, or just to listen to its little motor strain against the ice. Even the alarm itself is done with wonderful artistic flair, sounding like an old fire station bell ringing its little metal heart out.

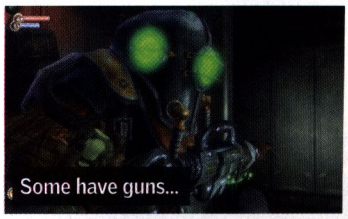
This freeform approach to killing things eventually culminates in fights with the Big Daddies – the monstrous, hulking mutants in modified diving suits plodding around, protecting little girls as they extract genetic material from corpses. Fighting one of the things (and winning) puts such a strain on your limited resources – first aid kits and ammunition – that some amount of preparation and consideration needs to be undertaken before you finally go for it. Big Daddies are placid, neutral things, right up until they're drilling into your torso. Stand too close to the child he's protecting and the Big Daddy's fatherly nature kicks in – the kid cowers behind one of its tree trunk legs, while it revs its drill and takes one or two threatening steps towards you.

The animation is perfect, worrying on some primal level, urging you to back away without saying a word – the subaquatic equivalent of baring teeth. It won't actually attack until you provoke it some more though, and generally you'll need some plan of action before you do that – a nearby enemy to use your 'Enrage' Plasmid on, a hacked security camera for the Big Daddy to run in front of, a series of electrified tripwires, some proximity mines. Basically, anything to stop the huge mass of metal and anger catching you and tearing you in two.

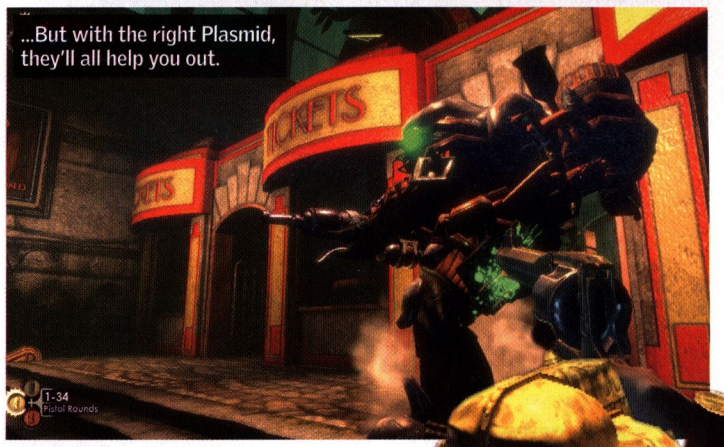
BODY HARVEST

Then, with the Big Daddy out of the way, you're left with the choice of whether or not to kill the small girl, the Little Sister. They're innocent things, and they'll cry over the death of their protector, but murdering them allows you to harvest their genetic material to spend on more Plasmids. The alternative is a little less morbid: release them from their corpse-harvesting occupation by turning them back into real girls. You get less of an immediate reward, and less to spend on Plasmids, but a warm feeling inside, knowing that the game will undoubtedly reward you somehow for choosing the good path. The drama surrounding this moral choice is diminished somewhat by the prompt to press one of two buttons bleakly labelled 'Harvest' and 'Rescue', but there's really no other way Irrational could have done it – and the animation behind each choice is chilling enough as it is without the opportunity to kill a small girl using bees. (Did I mention you can shoot bees from your hand if you have the right Plasmid? Well you can.)

The morality thing is something we've gushed about before, and to be honest, a bit of experimenting reveals that one way *is* better and more rewarding than the other


Some have guns...


...Some are more agile than they look...


...But with the right Plasmid, they'll all help you out.

Vita-Chambers

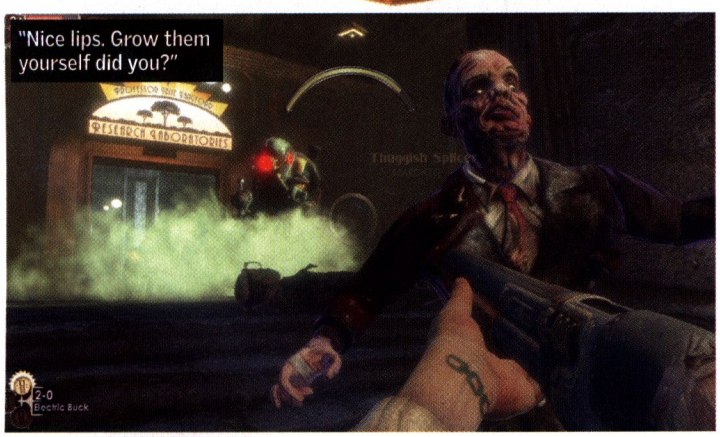
Who wants to live forever?


It also cures your dandruff.

One of the game's only real negative points is how it handles your death. Similar to how things were done in *System Shock 2*, you come across Vita-Chambers – machines which regenerate your body after you die. Sounds fairly innocuous, sure, but it turns any really difficult part of the game into a war of attrition. Dying is less about actually being dead, and more about simply being teleported back to an arbitrary location. You still have all your equipment and Plasmids, the enemies you were fighting are still hurt (meaning they'll be easier to kill this time), and there's no real punishment involved. Hell, one time I let a Big Daddy squish me just because the Vita-Chamber I'd end up in was closer to where I wanted to go (which must represent the ultimate in laziness). Hardly game-breaking, but still a bit weird.



Rapture's zero-tolerance policy on smuggling proves a success.



Sealab 2021

How hacking isn't really hacking at all, it's pipes!



A complicated security system that can identify and distinguish between friend and foe before sending a team of automated hovering bots after you? Surely that's controlled by a complex electronic system the likes of which could not even be comprehended in 1960? Nope, it's done with pipes. Clear the tiles by clicking on them, and then swap the pipes around to make the metallic liquid flow out of the right place. As silly as it sounds, it's a very nice hacking interface, and one that requires some degree of skill. If the liquid touches an unflipped tile, or a wall, or a special exploding tile, the machine you're trying to hack might short-circuit and explode. It might even call in more security bots. Oh pipes, is there anything you can't do?

But it's not this particular choice that makes *BioShock* such a fantastic game – it's more the surroundings, the story, the secrets, the characters and their dialogue, the unfaltering pace and the breathtaking set-pieces. The enemies rarely feel like fodder, and the Big Daddies actually feel more like boss characters – like hunting big game.

SMART MISSILES

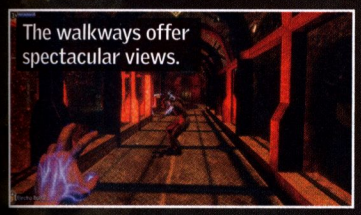
The combat system shines when you're taking on the Big Daddies as well. In one instance, I'd hacked a rocket launcher turret to target my enemies, fired a pistol shot at a Big Daddy to lure it within range, and then repeatedly froze it in place using Winter Blast while the rocket launcher went to work firing round after round into its back. Another situation saw me setting up a series of electrified tripwires, standing in such a position as to place the wires between myself and the Big Daddy, firing that all-important aggravating shot and watching as he ran through my trap and died, his limp body sliding to a stop just in front of me.

The weapons you pick up along the way can be modified to make them faster, more powerful, or capable of holding more ammunition, with each individual upgrade becoming visible on the weapon in the form of a DIY retrofit – increase the pistol's capacity and you'll see a large tin can appear on the side of it. Some weapons can also be loaded with ammunition effective against armoured enemies such as turrets and Big Daddies, or effective against personnel. Later weapons offer fire, lightning and ice alternatives, which work effectively against enemies who have genetically modified themselves in such a way as to become vulnerable to those things.

Almost every other aspect of *BioShock* is lifted from its spiritual predecessor *System Shock 2*. Even the weapons upgrade system just mentioned is a reworking of the OS upgrade system of the 1999 classic. The vending machines of *SS2* also find their way to Rapture in pretty much an identical state, albeit with more catchy jingles. Dollars can be used to buy ammo and supplies, while the machine itself can be hacked for lower prices or exclusive items. The level structure is similar too, with Rapture being composed of about eight large zones separated by bulkheads. Locations include the medical pavilion, the recreational area with its ironically nautical-themed bars, strip clubs and record stores, theatres, arboretums, fisheries, power stations – Rapture is a massively varied place, becoming more and more industrial as the game goes on. Although, you can walk freely between Rapture's zones in search of Little Sisters or to track down things you think you might have missed.

WATER EVERYWHERE

System Shock 2's research system, meanwhile, has been completely rethought: picking up a camera and snapping Rapture's inhabitants gives you info about them, leading to increased damage against that particular enemy. In the style of the Xbox 360's *Dead Rising*, you get a better grade for taking photos containing multiple subjects and action, and a worse grade for shots of dead bodies.


The walkways offer spectacular views.


TVs: great for progressing the plot.

BioShock is an expertly crafted game in every respect, and one that will be a milestone in PC gaming


Atlas, your in-ear Irish friend, talks you through the opening scenes. He's great.

BioShock made me sick

Bluergh, urrgghh, eeeuuurghhhh... Excuse me


Vomitingly good fun.

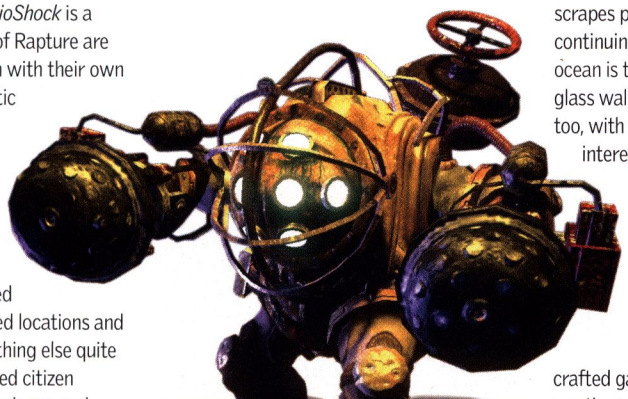
I've never had motion sickness before, and I used to laugh and feel superior to that sizeable minority who felt ill when they played *Half-Life 2*, but *BioShock* (admittedly after playing the thing for hours and hours and hours) made me deposit the contents of my stomach into a nearby toilet on more than one occasion. There was one bit where you're inside a train that's half turned over, and the sight of the angled walls made my stomach try to leap out of my face. I was properly spewing and everything, until my stomach hurt and I was sitting on the tiles with tears streaming down my face, but you know what? I kept going. THE GAME IS SIMPLY THAT GOOD. Well, that and I wanted to have my review in on time. Sometimes this job is literally torture.




She's riding a burning mutant – this is why we gave it a Classic.


Pretty.


Flooding is *so* in right now.




Proof that they do eventually die.

As if it needed stating, *BioShock* is a dark game. The characters of Rapture are demented egomaniacs, each with their own insular agendas and psychotic tendencies, and all of them are brilliantly scripted and voice-acted. The game has a fitting soundtrack, from '50s pop standard crooners to classic American swing, and it's used perfectly alongside the ruined locations and upsettingly grim locals – nothing else quite feels like hearing a bedraggled citizen mournfully cry out, "They made me and everything I see!" repeatedly and with rising anguish until he's sobbing uncontrollably, while *How Much Is That Doggy...* crackles from a nearby gramophone.

The menace of Rapture, the almost palpable feeling of foreboding, is brought to life by the sound design. Random clunks and scrapes punctuate quiet exploration with a continuing reminder of exactly how much ocean is trying to get inside of Rapture's glass walls. And of course visually it amazes too, with detail that not only draws your interest at every turn, but allows for danger to come from any direction. Not once does it ever drop the style it's created for itself, not even in menu screens – the game's got atmosphere coming out of every pore.

BioShock is an expertly crafted game in every respect, a truly worthy successor to what's considered one of the PC's greatest games, and a game that, we feel, will be a milestone in PC gaming. Never has the medium been used as a storytelling device in such a beautiful and engaging way, and never have we been drawn so deeply into a gameworld. Long live Rapture. PCZ

PCZONE

Graphics	Looks like an art-deco city under the water should
Sound	Atmospheric, from the old-fashioned soundtrack to the superb dialogue
Multiplayer	Nope – you're all alone down there

- ✓ Captivating, well-told story
- ✓ Movie quality voice-acting and script
- ✓ Emergent combat allows for huge variation in tactics
- ✓ The soundtrack, the locations, the visuals
- ✓ The many, many Plasmids and the brilliant final levels
- ✗ At one point it ends

96

In 20,000 leagues of its own

MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR – KINGDOMS

EXPANSION PACK

DEVELOPER
The Creative Assembly
PUBLISHER Sega
WEBSITE
www.totalwar.com
ETA August 31
PRICE £19.99

CLASSIC • CLASSIC PCZONE CLASSIC • CLASSIC

Martin Korda takes out his frustrations, medieval-style...

APPARENTLY, I'M SEXUALLY frustrated. That's if you believe the theory of some of the *PC ZONE* full-time staffers who, so rumour has it (ie, after a drunken confession from Steve 'NeverQuest' Hill), analyse a Korda *Total War* review like Freud would have scrutinised a patient who inadvertently blurted out, "I want to have sex with my daddy's sister!" in the middle of a lengthy psychotherapy session.

Words such as 'thrusting' and 'pounding' – used by this reviewer to describe scenes of brutality within the series – are apparently signals that I'm not getting any of the good stuff. Well, as much as I refute these groundless allegations, this analysis may – for once – be rooted in some truth. Why? Because *Kingdoms*, *Medieval II: Total War's* first expansion is immense and has taken up pretty much every waking moment of the past week. It's an RTS add-on pack unlike any I've ever seen before, one that shames, nay, utterly humiliates (bondage reference?) many standalone games with its sheer depth (a bit too obscure?) and wealth of options.


Sit back and let the natives wipe each other out.

IT'S SO BIG!

Nestling inside (oo-er, missus) this package is not one, not two, not three, but *four* full campaigns bursting (surely that one counts?) with content. That's around 50 hours of gameplay if you want to get numerical about it. And that's if you decide to only play through each campaign once.

As you can see, we've got plenty to cover, so let's wade straight in and find out whether *Kingdoms'* content can stack up to its unarguable girth (how about that one?)...

One of the criticisms levelled at the original game was that the Aztec sections were a positive letdown. If you were one of the people disappointed by this somewhat threadbare tail-end bonus, then you'll be champing at the proverbial bit in order to free your teeth so that you can sink them into *Kingdoms'* beefy Americas campaign.

Taking charge of either the Spanish conquistadors or one of three local tribes (Aztecs, Mayans or Apacheans), you must attempt to seize control of the resource-rich realm of South America.

The obvious choice is to opt for the Spanish, but while this may give you a sizeable technological advantage over the lightly armoured locals, you'll quickly find that expanding on your meagre starting foothold is more than a moderate challenge. The campaign's early stages bear more than a passing resemblance to *Rome's Alexander* expansion, forcing you to rely heavily on local mercenaries while you wait for Spanish armies to be ferried across the sea.

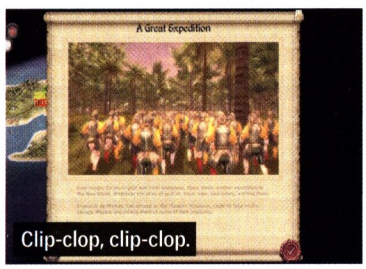
However, it's on the battlefield that you'll come up against your greatest challenge. While the New Worlders (as they like to call themselves) may be armed with sharpened matchsticks, their sheer weight of numbers means they can easily envelope your smaller armies and totally outmanoeuvre a complacent general. However, you'll find that the campaign's latter stages (if you play as Spain) become a little too easy once you've got adequate heavy-duty units at your disposal and you've realised that your best bet is to sit back, wait for the neighbour-hating natives to soften each other up, then move in for the kill.

Controlling one of the three native tribes brings a whole new set of challenges. Not only do you have to contend with the Spanish invasion – later added to by the French and the British – you also have to fend off rival tribes, while appeasing your gods with sacrifices.

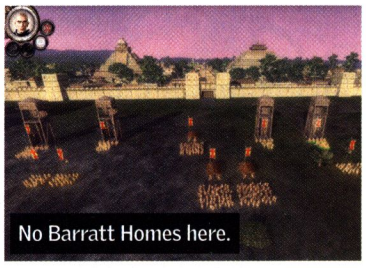
UNCAPED CRUSADER

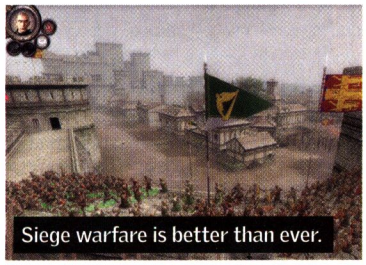
Onto the Crusades campaign then, in which you command one of the five dominant factions scattered throughout the Holy Land in a bid to unify it. Of course, you'll also have to contend with those pesky European Crusades that crash against your walls like waves of steel on an irritatingly regular basis.

This cauldron of hate and death proves a far more considered and strategic affair than its claustrophobic Americas counterpart, forcing you to guide your armies over searing expanses of desert and unwelcoming



Clip-clop, clip-clop.


No Barratt Homes here.


Siege warfare is better than ever.


Once the Spanish get a foothold, they're hard to repel.

AT A GLANCE...

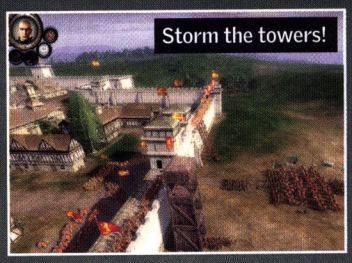
A superb expansion pack for *Medieval II: Total War*, offering four enormous campaigns and a wealth of new features, units and factions.

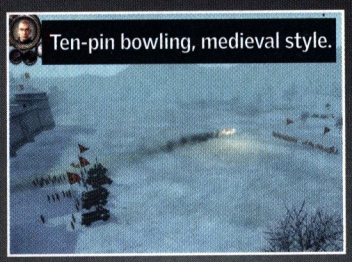
Minimum system requirements:
1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card with Shader 1.0 support.

HOW IT STACKS

MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR – KINGDOMS	90%
ROME: TOTAL WAR – BARBARIAN INVASION	88%
ROME: TOTAL WAR – ALEXANDER	85%


Carnival time.

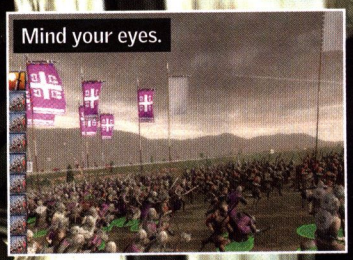

Storm the towers!

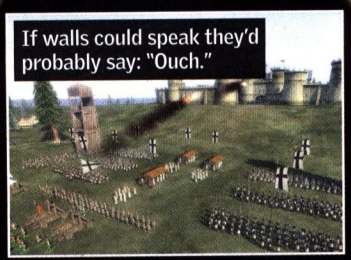

Ten-pin bowling, medieval style.

Medieval flamethrowers can grill a knight medium rare in three seconds



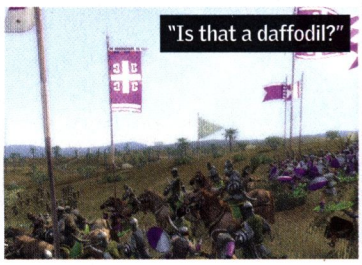
Can the Teutonic Knights wipe out paganism forever?


Mind your eyes.


If walls could speak they'd probably say: "Ouch."


Let's see you climb these walls now.


Here comes trouble.


"Is that a daffodil?"

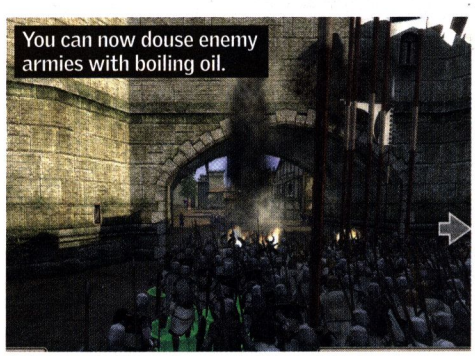
Solid as a rock

Oil and stone make for siege heaven...

Didn't it just piss you off when you'd spent hours setting up your city/castle defences in *Med II*, just to have your 10m thick walls pounded down by a couple of catapult shots? It did? Me too.

Happily, *Kingdoms* has rectified all that. Castle walls can now take a far greater pounding before they start to disintegrate, meaning you have time to employ some proper strategy rather than just trying to plug gaps in your walls with spearmen. Sending out archers and cavalry to intercept stray artillery is a particularly satisfying tactic to employ.

But the siege improvements don't end there. Once the enemy has knocked down your gate and rushed through the opening, they're met by cauldrons of boiling oil that cascade onto their bonces. Watching enemies flay as they melt inside their plate mail is a joy to behold.


You can now douse enemy armies with boiling oil.

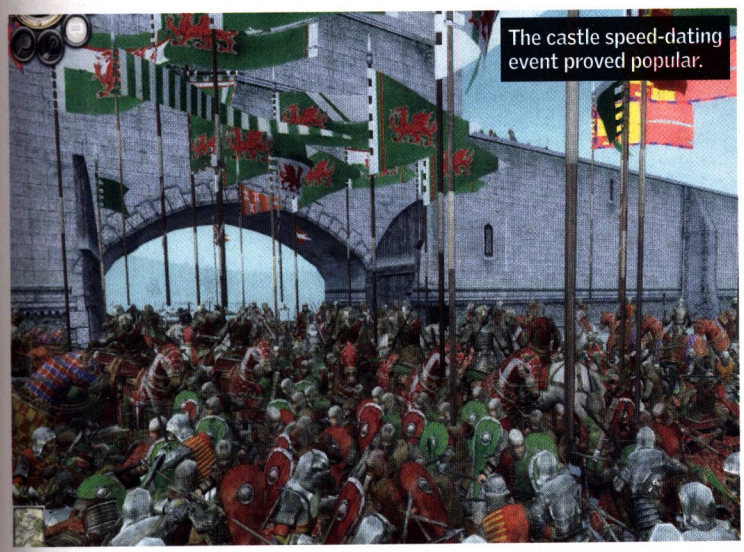
mountainous terrain to reach your next destination, while ensuring that you keep your major cities fortified in readiness for the Crusade invasions.

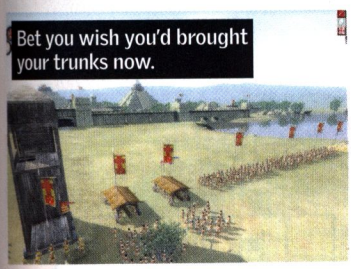
Playing as Jerusalem or Antioch gives you access to the game's most powerful knights (Templar and Hospitallers), while Egypt and Turkey possess the best nippy horse archers, making for some interesting tactical conundrums as brute force meets speed and manoeuvrability.

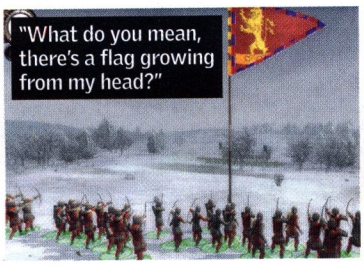
However, of the campaign's five playable empires, it's the Byzantines who offer the most innovative set of units, including Greek Fire Throwers who ostensibly wield medieval flamethrowers that can grill a knight to medium rare in under three seconds.

ING-GER-LAND

If you've ever played the *Viking Invasion* expansion for the original *Medieval*, then you'll find the Britannia campaign instantly familiar. While it's not exactly the same, there are certainly a fair few similarities. Taking control of the land-rich English, one of the English-hating nations (Scotland, Wales or Ireland) or the invading Norse hordes, you must conquer the whole of the British Isles. The obvious choice here is to opt for the English, who start off controlling well over half the map but are soon beset on all sides by enemies. It's actually far more entertaining to play as the Scots, Welsh, Irish or even the Norse, who must overcome seemingly insurmountable odds to achieve victory.


The castle speed-dating event proved popular.


Bet you wish you'd brought your trunks now.


"What do you mean, there's a flag growing from my head?"

Adding an extra strategic dimension to the campaign map are numerous stone forts, which you can use to stem the flow of enemies into your lands. However, with most of these under English rule at the start of the campaign, you'll have to capture them first. This campaign is also heavily focused on culture, which influences several key areas including what units you can build and a more prominent role for Governors.

BATTLE FOR THE BALTIC

Kingdoms' final bloody chapter is the Teutonic campaign, boasting what is perhaps the expansion pack's most diverse selections of factions. Eager to send the Pagan Lithuanians to hell, the Teutonic Knights launch an invasion of the Baltic, taking out anyone – Pagan or otherwise – who stands in their way. These boys pack some serious punch with a devastating array of heavy foot and mounted warriors, as well as Mangonels that fire exploding barrels that shower the enemy with a torrent of fire.

The nippy but undisciplined Lithuanians, axe-loving Danes and the wealthy state of Novgorod complete the line-up in an enthralling campaign that perfectly rounds off a package rammed with strategic battles with a heavy emphasis on troop placement and terrain advantage.

So there you have it: four whopping campaigns just waiting to suck you dry of your spare time and turn you into a social recluse. Gargantuan, thrilling, tactical, varied and haemorrhaging new features, *Kingdoms* has to go down as one of the most ambitious and impressive expansion packs of all time, embellished by one of the finest musical scores you'll ever have heard in a game. But that doesn't mean that it's above criticism. So with red pen held aloft, let's dive in and start circling some mistakes.

THIS WAY, HORSEY...

For starters, cavalry is still a problem. In fact, seeing as it's such an imperative element of both the Teutonic and Crusades campaigns, it's even more of a problem than in the original game. Pathfinding is highly skewed, with horsemen often veering off in the opposite direction you've ordered them in, resulting in horses wading into lines of spears and turning themselves into ready-made nag kebabs. Exacerbating the cavalry conundrum is the fact that mounted units still have a tendency to pull up before the all-important impact, robbing you of those infantry-pulverising moments that made cavalry charges such a triumph in *Rome*.

The newly added mid-battle updates are also a mixed bag, proving inaccurate as often as they are informative. If one of your units retreats, it's suddenly all: "Mighty lord our army is lost, the enemy are crushing us and to make matters worse it's started to rain and we've left the umbrellas back at the keep."

Setting the attitude of your AI commanders (who back you up in conflicts involving more than one army) is also somewhat of an anticlimax. Choose from the three stances on offer – offensive, defensive and shootout – then watch as the AI general wades idiotically into the fray and gets himself killed, while his leaderless troops get butchered. A seriously missed opportunity if ever I've seen one.

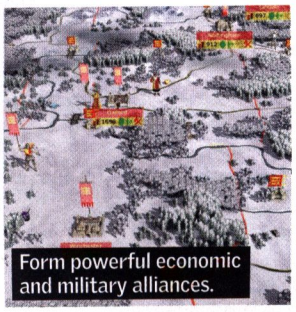
LOVE AND WAR

While it may not be perfect, *Medieval II: Total War – Kingdoms'* sheer depth and replayability raises it high above any RTS expansion pack I've ever played. By breaking down *Med II's* main campaign into bite-sized chunks, adding new factions, units, diplomatic options and tasks, *Kingdoms* manages to provide an all new experience while remaining reassuringly familiar. Which is why I'm going to do something I've never done before. I'm going to award an add-on pack the much sought-after *PC ZONE* Classic award. It's an expansion that's kept me enthralled for dozens of hours and I've loved every ecstasy-inducing, spear-thrusting, pounding, hammering moment of it. Analyse that! I'm off to make war... PCZ

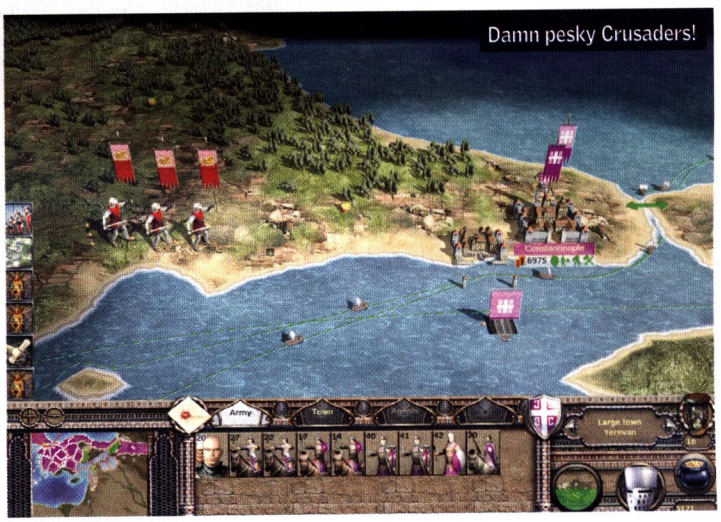
Allied assault

Form friendships, then kill everything in sight

Another new feature that *Kingdoms* brings to the *Total War* table is the ability to form specific alliances – both military and economic. The Kalmar Union, for example, sees you endeavouring to unite the Norse people under one banner when playing as the Danes in the Teutonic campaign, while forming the Hanseatic League will hugely bolster your trading prowess. These leagues add yet another layer of tactical possibilities to *Medieval II's* already exhaustive list of strategic options and help to make *Kingdoms* one of the most comprehensive and impressive expansion packs of all time.


Form powerful economic and military alliances.

While it may not be totally perfect, the sheer depth and replayability of *Kingdoms* raises it high above any RTS expansion I've ever played


Damn pesky Crusaders!

PCZONE

Graphics	Splendorous
Sound	One of the best game soundtracks ever
Multiplayer	Huge multiplayer wars

- ✓ Four massive, varied campaigns
- ✓ A wealth of new features, units and factions
- ✓ Unrivalled replayability
- ✓ Excellent tweaks to siege battles
- ✗ A few new features poorly executed

90

True royalty



You know, this place is beautiful in every iteration of *Civ*.

CIVILIZATION IV: BEYOND THE SWORD

RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED

"Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!" cries a power-crazed *Will Porter* from his customary weather-beaten plinth...

DEVELOPER Firaxis
PUBLISHER 2K Games
WEBSITE www.2kgames.com/civ4/beyondthesword
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

AT A GLANCE...

Not a true expansion so much as a loving upgrade to the existing *Civ* format, with a ton of extras besides.

Minimum system requirements:
1.2GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

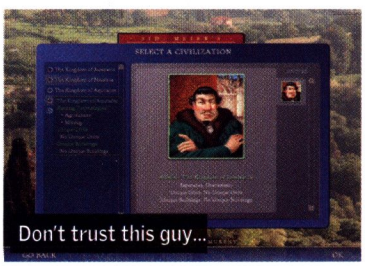
HOW IT STACKS

CIVILIZATION IV	92%
CIVILIZATION IV: BEYOND THE SWORD	86%
CIVILIZATION IV: WARLORDS	79%

POSSIBLY BECAUSE MY mind is only developed enough to skim both the content and subject matter of *Civilization IV*, I am thoroughly baffled as to how yet again Firaxis have managed to surgically splice such reams of new content onto an already beautifully constructed working model. It's like the already full hands of a one-man-band suddenly being granted the ability to play banjo, french horn and kazoo on top of their existing duties. It's all about a heightened complexity, extra layers being added to the Victoria sponge that is *Civilization IV* to make it even tastier – if occasionally hard to swallow if you haven't chewed enough times .

The 'banjo' of the last-but-one loose metaphor is espionage – a reinvention of the bygone *Civ* stalwart that was the diplomat. So it is then that you can breed sultry Cate Archer types to foment unhappiness or poison water supplies in foreign parts, and pump money into your security services as you would research or culture so that you know what the Hun/Bosch/Frogs/whatever are up to.

It's a neat and engaging sideshow (guaranteed to blow up in your face on its first use and inadvertently kick off a snowballing spy frenzy), bringing a new level of distrust and deception to the game. Do you keep on brewing discontent in a rival city again and again, denying the inevitability that a nation who thinks you its friend will eventually find out and get sulky? Do you pump time and money into counter-espionage to discover just how large a nest of foreign spies are idling in your cities? It's an engaging system and, as is the way with both this and previous expansion *Warlords*, once you taste this newly full-fat variety of *Civ*, it's extremely hard to go back. Lose the newfound early diplomatic opportunities granted to me by the Apostolic Palace? Quite frankly, I'd rather die.



Don't trust this guy...

ZAIBATSU COMIN' AT YOU

Next up are corporations, which work much as religions do – even if they're a mite more random to set up, what with their need for certain tech, great people and certain resources to get off the ground. They spread across nations, granting different economic bonuses to cities (and extra cash for whichever civ spawned Sid's Sushi Company, Aluminium Inc or whoever), and bring a welcome amount of extra economic thrust to the endgame. Though personally I'm usually either struggling to build a spaceship or on the verge of military collapse by that point. Oh, and with that final rocket-launch

Beyond Civilization

Zombies? Ghost things? *X-Com*? What's going on?



One of the stranger departures for *Beyond The Sword* is 'Afterworld', an *X-Com*-inspired affair in which a team of Gravebringers (after a lengthy and rather dull intro) drop into a dusty, darkened world in which zombie robots have human brains – or possibly vice versa. It's a nice example of just how far modding can go with the *Civ* engine, but you have to ask exactly who's going to play it. It's mildly engaging, but still not as engaging as one of the many *X-Com* rip offs appearing on shelves on a monthly basis. Playing any variation of *Civ* without city equivalents or a snarling Julius Caesar makes me feel a bit naked as well. One for the pure-blood fans I reckon...





If Gandhi has cunningly delayed his launch to strap on an extra booster, he may well overtake you. The swine

it's all about actually reaching Alpha Centauri now, so if Gandhi has cunningly delayed his launch to strap on an extra booster, he may well overtake you in the depths of space. The swine.

The only new piece of plumbing that jars slightly, meanwhile, is the inclusion of random events – floods, earthquakes and the like. It certainly keeps you more in touch with the common folk (choosing the amount of relief to grant a mining community stricken by an explosion for example), but it's very much a needless side salad next to the game proper. Who cares that a certain song has entranced the plebs to such an extent that you can order that the tunesmith in question be given a recording contract? There's a war on! If you're a fan of on-screen textual clutter you can pretty much fill your boots, but tellingly this is an option that can be turned off while setting up your game.

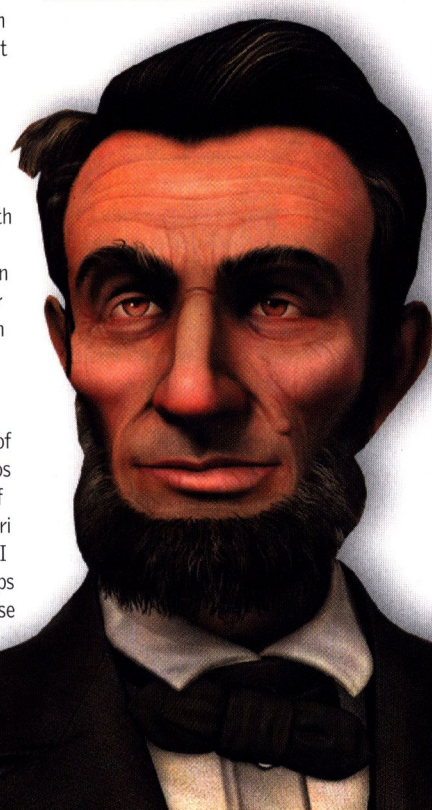






CONTENT IS KING

All this, though, is dwarfed by the amount of developer and community-created scenarios and mods packaged with the expansion – if you were on a real voyage to Alpha Centauri with only *Beyond The Sword* for company, I doubt you'd have enough time to get to grips with it. They're a lot more fanciful than those packaged with *Warlords*, whose earthy tones and barbarian leanings truly got my pulse racing, but there's some super-good stuff in here too. I've always been a fan of the Fall From Heaven fantastical mod, so the inclusion of its offspring Age Of Ice is rather nice. Final Frontier, meanwhile, takes affairs into deep space, while back on boring old Earth more traditional variations on *Civ* see grumpy Mesopotamian gods backing up different world powers in Gods Of Old and the Pope needs buttering up in the Charlemagne campaign.



As regular readers will know, I'm a hapless yet interminably-addicted *Civilization* player, usually quite happy if future generations simply get to say, "You remember Will of the Willish? As seemingly immortal yet largely incompetent dictators go, he was just A-OK!" From my lowly Dan Quayle-ite standings then, it's clear to me that every *Civ*-phile high and low will adore *Beyond The Sword*. Yet another love-letter from Firaxis to their fanbase, and as good a reason for living as chips. PCZ

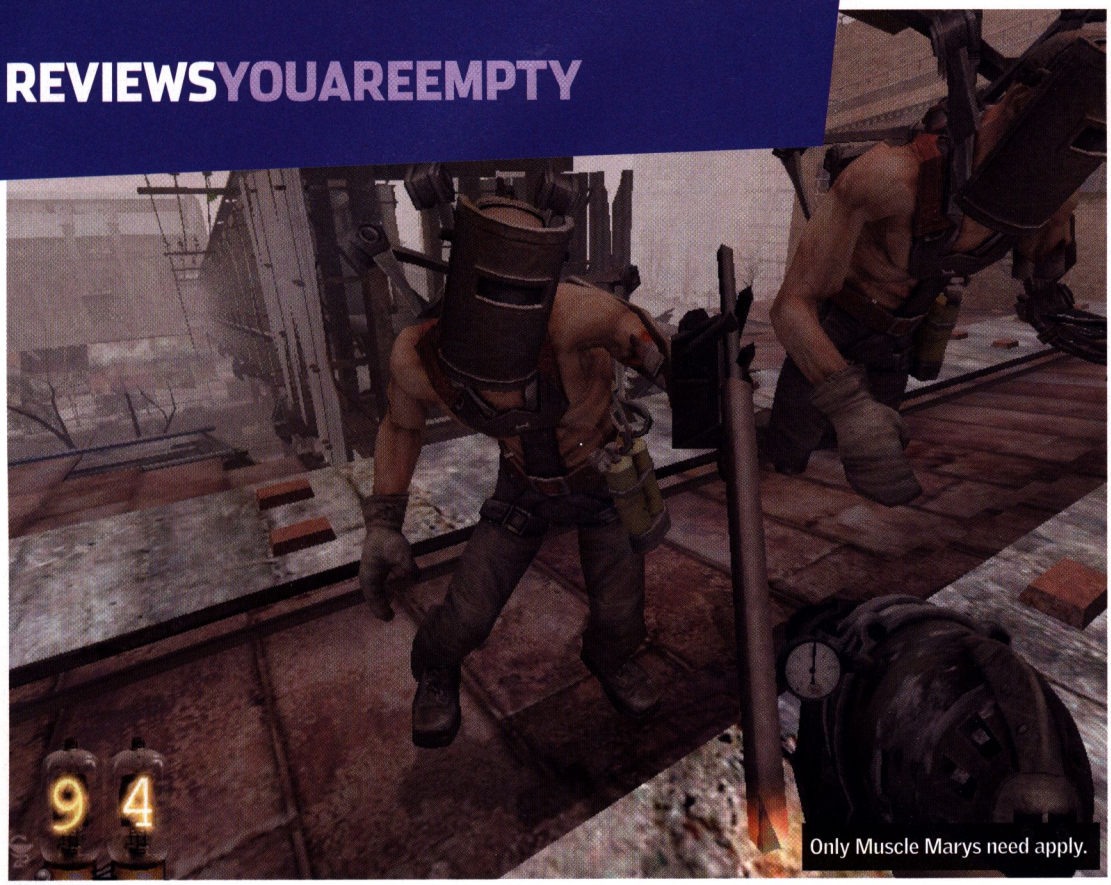
PCZONE

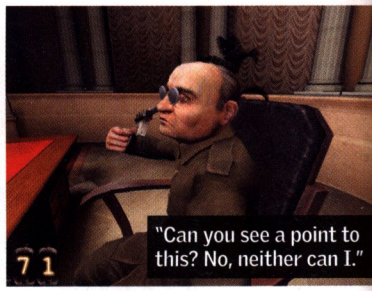
Graphics Charming as ever
Sound Wot? No new Nimoy?
Multiplayer In spades

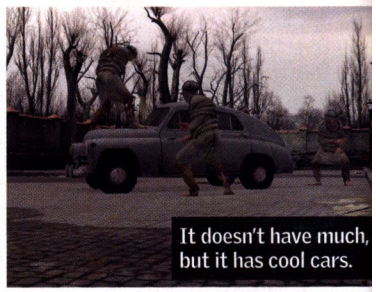
- ✓ A true improvement on vanilla *Civ IV*
- ✓ Brain-teasing espionage system
- ✓ Excellent endgame tweaks
- ✓ Bucketloads of scenarios and mods...
- ✗ ...even if some fall a little flat

86

Above and beyond









YOU ARE EMPTY

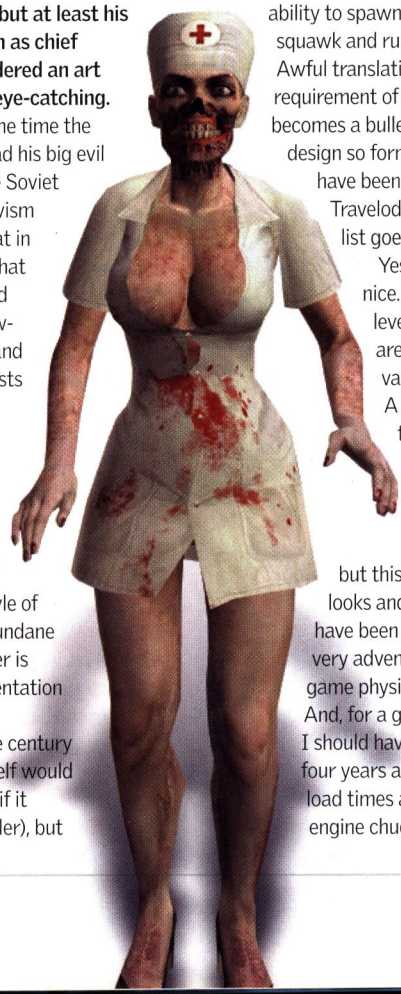
Will Porter plays a game that accurately reflects living in Stalinist Russia. It's shit...

DEVELOPER Digital Spray
PUBLISHER 1C/GamersGate
WEBSITE www.youareempty.com
ETA Out now
PRICE €29.99 (£20) download from www.gamersgate.com

SAY WHAT YOU like about Joseph Stalin. He may have led an autocratic, brutal regime enacted through a climate of suspicion, distrust and terror – but at least his upsettingly long reign as chief Soviet despot engendered an art style that was quite eye-catching.

But not really. By the time the moustachioed twat had his big evil boots firmly under the Soviet red carpet, constructivism was dead. So dead that in 1932, Stalin decreed that socialist realism should be the 'in-thing' for law-abiding communists, and much of the striking fists in the air and sharp edged images of people-power was consigned to the history-erasing department. Which is a shame, because it means that the art style of this fundamentally mundane and depressing shooter is based on a misrepresentation of history.

Hardly crime of the century to be fair (Stalin himself would have had dibs on that if it wasn't for that Mr Hitler), but still a minor footnote on a list of flaws that, to be honest, you can guess already. Dated linear shootery. Rubbish floaty weapons. Enemies with no AI bar the ability to spawn round a corner, squawk and run at you head-on. Awful translation. A skill requirement of zero suddenly becomes a bullet landslide. Level design so formulaic it could have been created by a Travelodge architect. The list goes on and on...



Yes, the art design is nice. Occasional inter-level FMV sequences are striking – even vaguely captivating. A genial mixture of the absurd (giant mutant chickens) mixes happily with traditional Ruskie imagery, but this is a game that looks and feels like it should have been released at the very advent of (gasp!) in-game physics and ragdolls. And, for a game that feels like I should have been playing it four years ago, dear lord the load times and occasional engine chug are irritating.

So yes, while the look of a few enemies and the forever winding and mysteriously blocked off streets of Stalin-ville may rest easy on the eye, this is one for your digital download habit to consciously avoid. The glass isn't 'half empty', it isn't even 'not full'. It's a soundless, hateful asphyxiating void. PCZ

AT A GLANCE...

You're in '50s Russia. Something's gone wrong. Lots of similar mutants run straight towards you and then get shot.

Minimum system requirements:
2.4GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 128 MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS
HALF-LIFE 2 97%
STALKER: SOC 85%
YOU ARE EMPTY 43%

PCZONE

Graphics: Neat, if endlessly repeated, art stylings
Sound: Dire moaning and groaning
Multiplayer: Zip

- ✓ Looks OK, good cut-scenes
- ✗ Ropey, slow-paced gameplay
- ✗ Dull as dishwater enemies
- ✗ Environments repeated ad infinitum
- ✗ Should have been released years ago

43
Ivan the terrible



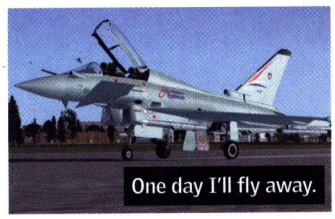
EUROFIGHTER TYPHOON

EXPANSION PACK

UKIP look away now...

DEVELOPER
First-Class Simulations
PUBLISHER Halcyon Media
WEBSITE
www.firstclass-simulations.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Min system req:
Same as *FSX* or *FS2004*, depending on whichever one you use



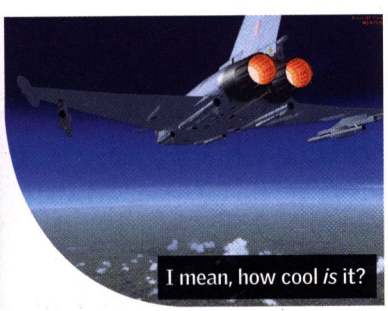
THE EUROFIGHTER TYPHOON is one of the coolest jet fighters ever built. It out-manoeuvred and achieved missile locks on a pair of cocky American F16s according to a story Jeremy Clarkson once made up (it didn't fire though, because we're all friends), and it's got little wings where it shouldn't have wings.

Flight Simulator X typically doesn't contain jet fighters, for various reasons. A big one is that the engine can't load scenery and textures fast enough to keep up with a jet fighter flying at thousands of kilometres per hour. Another is that jet fighters are more complicated than your average Cessna, with a load more buttons and switches to play with. This is the main problem with jet fighter add-ons for *FS*, besides the inability to use the buttons on your joystick that launch missiles and makes things explode.

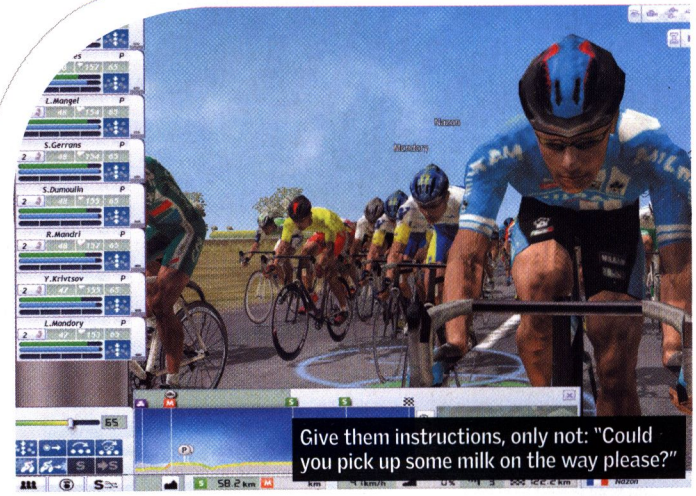
This is simply a new plane (with many included variants) for *FSX*, a way of flying between the game's airports with militaristic style. The manual talks about all the things real Eurofighters can do, but *FSX* doesn't let you. There's no hot disembodied lady telling you to pull-up as you spiral out of control, and there's no growling missile lock. The manual is a list of things this add-on can't do.

Eurofighter Typhoon works under both *FSX* and *FS2004*, but you'd be better off picking up *Lock On: Modern Air Combat* for your thrills in the sky.

Steve Hogarty



PCZONE 45
Peacekeeper

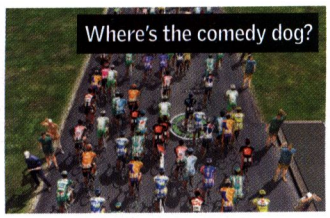


PRO CYCLING MANAGER: SEASON 2007

More thighs of steel, clad in lycra...

DEVELOPER Cyanide
PUBLISHER Focus Home Interactive
WEBSITE www.cycling-manager.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99

Min system req:
1GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

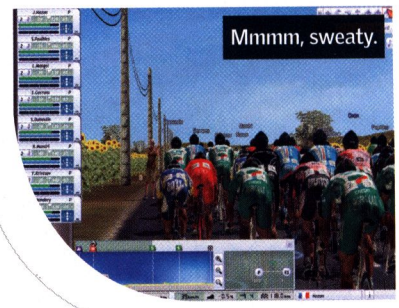


EXACTLY TWO YEARS ago in issue 159, I reviewed *Pro Cycling Manager*, giving it 32% and calling it "bland, vaguely interactive and utterly confusing". I wrote that during my work-experience week on the magazine, when I was 18-and-a-bit, and it's the review that, coupled with staff shortages, got me a job on this magazine. It's a game that has a special place in my heart. Thank you, cycling game.

But while time has given me various new hats and shoes to wear (thanks, time), this game has been left pretty much as it was when it was last reviewed. You're a professional manager of cyclists, with bike-riding Europeans at your beck and call. Lead them to victory by studying stat sheets and mumbling to yourself about your lead rider's ability to 'get on someone's wheel' while cornering on cobblestones on a hot day. Send them to Corsica for some mountain training, deal with the press, give them specific instructions during the race – it's all really boring, but the kind of thing cycling enthusiasts actually enjoy. And if your riders are very good, they might even get to wear yellow.

Unlike *Football Manager*, where simply knowing the shape of a football will let you eke some enjoyment from it, a casual interest in bikes just doesn't cut it here. It's mostly bland, somewhat interactive and slightly confusing. An improvement, then.

Steve Hogarty



PCZONE 40
Tour de Pants

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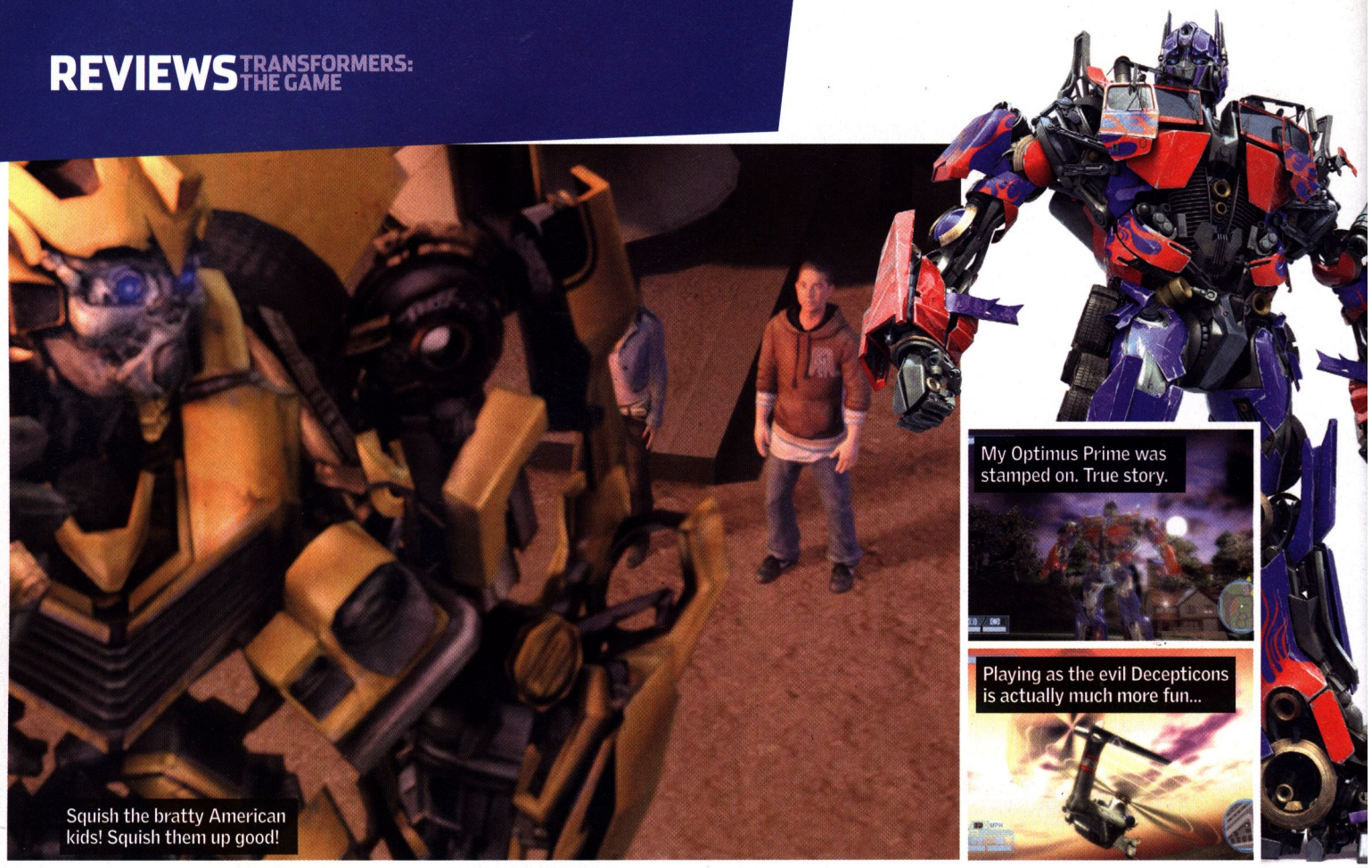
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TRANSFORMERS: THE GAME

Dan Marshall wages his battle to destroy the evil forces of... The Decepticons

DEVELOPER Traveller's Tales
PUBLISHER Activision
WEBSITE www.transformersgame.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £29.99



AT A GLANCE...

Huge, stompy, shape-changing robots fight it out while you calculate how much your old collection was worth.

Minimum system requirements:
2GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

PLAYING WITH THE TOYS	100%
HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX	79%
TRANSFORMERS: THE GAME	61%

WHEN YOU FIRE this up, here's what you think in the first heart-fluttering moments: "Oh my god, I'm a *robot* and I'm in *disguise* and *Optimus Prime* is giving me orders and telling me what to do... OMG OMG..."

Is this it? The very epitome of gaming cool? It can't get much better than this, surely? It's exactly like what was happening in my head 20 years ago except this time, it doesn't take place on my bedroom floor and Lion-O doesn't improbably turn up halfway through and inexplicably start scrapping with Bumblebee.

If you're a little child, then back off, pal. This game isn't for you. Your primitive mind wouldn't understand the complex inner workings going on here. You'll probably take one look at the bland buildings and laughable vehicle models and switch off the PC in disgust.

You wouldn't understand – you weren't there at the beginning. You won't forgive *Transformers* its repetitive mission structure or incredulous handling. That's *realistic*, yeah? That's what it would *actually be like*, to be a robot (in disguise), so just back off. You can even play as the Decepticons if you were the sort of evil, twisted kid that stole my Matt Tracker toy in primary school and threw it under a lawnmower.

METAL MICKEY

Either way, you generally race across various teeny-tiny sandbox environments going from A to B before bashing the screws out of another robot and then doing some more racing. Then it ends, and you wish maybe they'd done something a bit more special with it so you didn't feel so sad inside your tummy.

Oh, I'd like to take a step back, I really, really would. I'd like to be able to look at this game objectively. If it wasn't tied to the *Transformers* franchise, it'd be a run-of-the-mill hodge-podge console action game, there's no two ways about it.

However, the simple fact of the matter is that having the Autobot logo for an icon immediately elevates *Transformers: The Game* up a few percentage points to the realms of 'maybe worth a look on a wet Sunday afternoon'. PCZ

PCZONE

Graphics	Great robots, sucky everything else
Sound	Lacking use of a certain theme tune
Multiplayer	Oh, if only...

- ✓ It has robots. In disguise!
- ✓ Voice of Optimus Prime telling you what to do
- ✓ Transforming into a robot never stops being ace
- ✗ Uninspired environments
- ✗ Repetitive, fiddly missions
- ✗ Uninspiring single-button combat

61

Not that much more than meets the eye

SFX

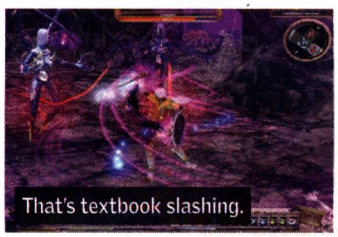
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That's textbook slashing.


"Marshmallow, anyone?"


Well, saves on heating bills.



Guess who's been on the Red Bull?

DEVELOPER Cyanide Studio
PUBLISHER Ascaron
WEBSITE www.loki-game.com
ETA August 24
PRICE £29.99

LOKI

By the gods! *Suzy Wallace* hacks and slashes her way through some legendary settings...

AH, THE HEADY days of *Diablo* – I remember them well. Explaining to my teacher that I couldn't join in with the rest of my art class because my hand hurt from such frantic clicking. Employing my sister as Chief Clicker of Potions. Neatly stockpiling my mounds of loot in town for later use, only to discover that after you kill Diablo and start again, it bloody disappears.

MYTHICAL REBIRTH

For a long while after *Diablo II*, the action-RPG genre was remarkably quiet, save for the *Dungeon Siege* series. Then *Titan Quest* was released, and since then it's seen a bit of a revival, with titles of varying quality being announced. *Loki*'s jump into the arena is noticeable thanks to its mythological settings. Of course, *Titan Quest* pipped it to the post on that score, but *Loki* does at least provide some refreshing alternatives.

Your setting is dictated by your choice of character: an Aztec shaman, a Greek fighter, a Norse warrior or an Egyptian sorcerer. While each character starts off in his or her own zone, after completing their particular missions, you'll be allowed to journey into the other zones as well, meaning you won't miss out. The game makes good use of the relevant mythologies, so, for example, the Greek storyline has you chatting to Athena, battling harpies and centaurs, visiting Troy and ending up in the depths of Hades. But it's the Norse and Aztec settings that really shine, with their unusual environments and mythical deities.


"Conquista *this*, amigos!"

BIG AND BEAUTIFUL

Ranging from the Minotaur in the Labyrinth of Knossos to the regally armoured Cortés, bosses here are big and seriously badass. In fact, Fafnir the Norse dragon – who, even fully zoomed out, doesn't fit onto the screen – must surely be the front-runner for the title of 'biggest action-RPG boss ever'.

The game is certainly no slouch in the visuals department either. Enemies are served up in glorious hi-res textures, and a lot of hits are accompanied by dazzling explosions of magical effects. Settings range from the comparatively dull Aztec jungle to glowing lava-filled caves, decorated Egyptian temples and even the galleons of Cortés and his Spanish cronies. Weapons and armour also offer lots of variation and some pretty cool outfits, from wings for the Aztec shaman to dark hooded cowls and scythes for the Egyptian sorcerer, should you ever wish to impersonate Death.

Aside from the mythical settings, pretty visuals and mostly throwaway story, *Loki* plays out much like a standard action-RPG. That's to say, you see an enemy, click on it repeatedly till it dies and rinse and repeat until your fingers are worn down to bloody stumps. The skill trees are governed by which of three (character-specific) gods your hero or heroine is currently worshipping. This system provides you with a decent selection of spells and abilities to choose from –


"I want my mummy!"

AT A GLANCE...

Action RPG featuring four legendary worlds (Aztec, Norse, Egyptian and Greek), complete with mythical-type enemies and gigantic bosses.

Minimum system requirements: 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

TITAN QUEST	81%
LOKI	73%
SACRED	65%





A load of old bull

Gods and religion were a little different back in the days of the Greeks...



Stories of rape, murder and incest abound in Greek mythology, but the story of how the Minotaur came into being arguably takes the cake for sheer shock value. When Minos was struggling for control of Crete, he asked Poseidon for a white bull as a sign of the god's approval, promising he would sacrifice it. When it appeared, however, Minos liked it so much that he decided to sacrifice another bull instead. Furious at this, Poseidon cursed Minos's wife Pasiphae by making her fall in love with the animal. Pasiphae had Daedalus craft her a wooden cow, which she hid inside to fool the bull, and the offspring of their lovemaking was the Minotaur. Now there's a story for the kids' bedtime...

Settings range from Aztec jungle to lava-filled caves, Egyptian temples and even the galleons of Cortés

the Aztec's jaguar transformation and spirit-walking being of particular note – with good opportunities for customisation. There are notably fewer drops than in most games of this ilk, which thankfully means fewer return journeys to town, and there are some other additions too, which, though helpful, don't really break any new ground.

Where *Loki* should do well is in the online market. With Cyanide putting a lot of effort into this side of things, you can take part in full six-player co-op in the main game, one-on-one and party duels, and challenges where up to six players can take on some of the game's tougher monsters. A full online ranking system and online storage of multiplayer characters are also provided, hopefully deterring some cheaters.

Thanks to its genre and settings, the comparisons with *Titan Quest* are pretty much inevitable. Although the graphics here aren't quite on a par with *TQ*'s stunning visuals, *Loki* does score over its rival by offering an adjustable camera, with full pan and zoom. But whereas *TQ* feels beautifully polished all over, as though a team of dedicated testers has spent years buffing up its mythical carapace, *Loki* can occasionally feel a little bit rougher round the edges. Creatures sometimes get stuck on scenery, exploding chests often don't show the animation but still play the sound effect, walking in some areas of one level makes the water become static, frame-rates suffer a drop in busy areas and we even suffered the odd crash to desktop too.

While *Loki*'s mythological settings, giant boss battles and pretty graphics make it a solid entry into the world of the action RPG, there's not much here that hasn't been done already, even if it was only pipped to the post on the mythology front by *Titan Quest*. *Diablo* fans who just can't wait to get their hands on the next click-fest will undoubtedly enjoy all the action, but for the rest of us mere mortals, *Loki* is more of a solid warrior and less of a gaming god. PCZ

PCZONE

Graphics	Varied settings and detailed creatures
Sound	Background music is adequate
Multiplayer	Yes, and lots of it

- ✓ Great boss battles
- ✓ Pretty graphics
- ✓ Novel mythological settings
- ✗ Needs a little more polish
- ✗ Throwaway storyline
- ✗ Frame-rate drops with lots of enemies

73

Not quite epic stuff



COMBAT MISSION: SHOCK FORCE

Uncle Sam's back to shock the Kasbah

DEVELOPER Big Time Software
PUBLISHER Paradox
WEBSITE www.battlefront.com/products/cmsf/index.html
ETA Out now
PRICE $45 (£22)



Min system req:
2GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 256MB graphics card.

IN A GAME that feels like it was commissioned by George W Bush, *Combat Mission: Shock Force* simulates a near-future US invasion of Syria. The good news is if you've got a boner for realism, *Shock Force* – the fourth title in the *Combat Mission* series – still delivers the goods in spades, with an improved engine and a new emphasis to real-time rather than turn-based action.

Commanding either high-tech US troops or Syrian cannon fodder, *Shock Force* is incredibly frustrating to master – even for *CM* veterans. There's no tutorial. The camera system is a total bitch. The interface is a complete mishmash, revolving around a horribly complex system of hotkeys. You don't even get any tooltips on the buttons and icons on the display. And unit pathfinding is dire, not making the whole real-time thing any easier.

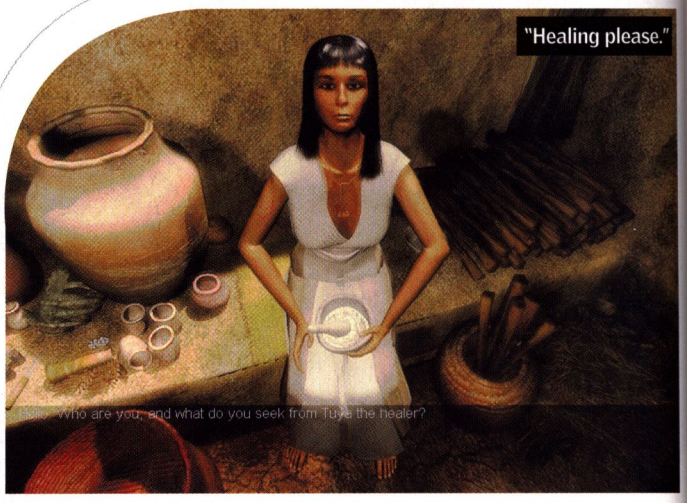
The whole US vs Syria doesn't help either, giving you the feeling of taking part in Donald Rumsfeld's wet dream, not to mention the repetitive scenery, lack of unit diversity and the almost complete absence of helicopters (and this is meant to be realistic?).

Battlefront have still got a great engine on their hands here, but they need to find a more exciting and comfortable setting, as well as sorting out their interface. The *Combat Mission* series has suffered something of a defeat in the deserts near Damascus, but *ZONE* feels it will be back.

Steve O'Hagan

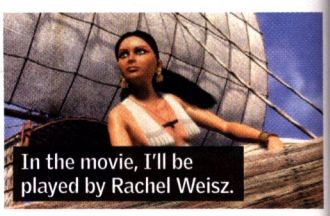


PCZONE 60
Mission unaccomplished



EGYPT II & III – COLLECTOR'S EDITION

A genre in de-nile



DEVELOPER Cryo/Kheops Studios
PUBLISHER The Adventure Company/JoWooD Games
WEBSITE egypt.tacgames.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Min system req:
600MHz processor, 64MB RAM and a 32MB graphics card.

SO WHAT NEXT-GEN game engine does the modern-day adventure title get to bask in? Unreal 3.0? CryEngine 2? Source? Yeah, any of those would be nice. Instead though, how about we dabble with Quicktime VR? After all, what need the modern adventurer of fancy renderings and polished control mechanisms. Perhaps if we spin the screen fast enough, the players will all get dizzy and fail to notice it's 2007.

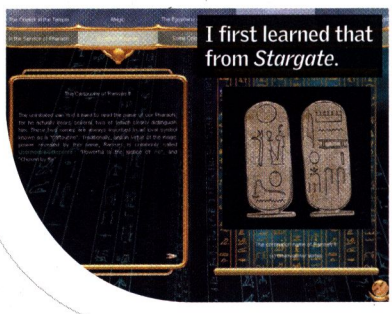
Flick-screen, limited interaction, lifeless character renders and the kind of puzzle challenge that wouldn't tax a five year old, mainly reduced to the age-old 'click one object on another until progression is granted' variety.

To be fair, the *Egypt* series has always tried to add an element of educational worthiness to things, with included 'encyclopedias' on the game's subject matter (often providing clues to the more parlour game-themed of the challenges). Very enlightening, but when the games then drape themselves in godly power and magic, it cancels out even that benefit and leaves little Johnny's history lessons as a confused affair. Did Penn & Teller die in vain?

So, not particularly challenging, poorly constructed using outdated tools and methodologies, a confusing standpoint between realism and spiritual mumbo jumbo, and of interest really only to historians.

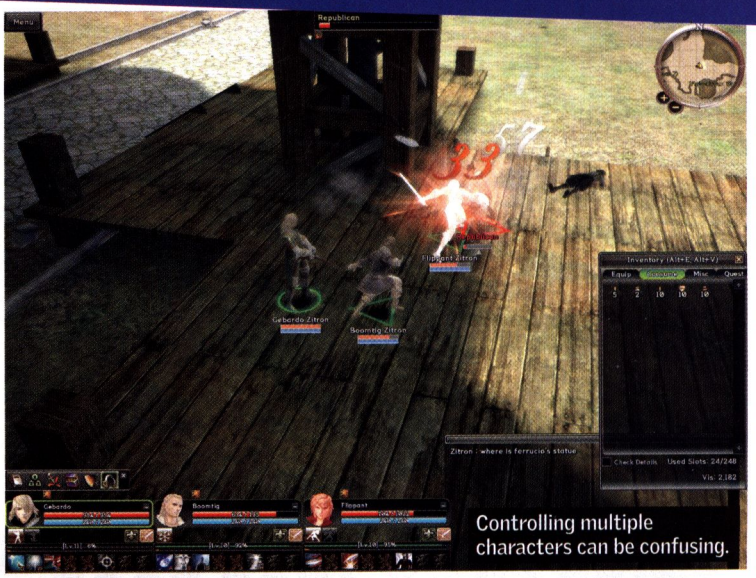
There's a joke about parallels between the game and the real ancient Egypt in there somewhere. Incidentally, both games take about two dedicated hours to get through from start to finish. You're better off renting *Carry On Cleo*.

Paul Presley



PCZONE 31
Ancient


Coming soon: Vidal Sassoon Mercenaries.


Controlling multiple characters can be confusing.

SWORD OF THE NEW WORLD: GRANADO ESPADA


The New World has a bad crocodile problem.

More Chelmsford than Barbados, says *Ed Zitron*

DEVELOPER IMC Games
PUBLISHER K2 Network
WEBSITE www.swordofthenewworld.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99 (+ optional subscription)

IMAGINE A SIMPLE RTS starring three metrosexual psychopaths, hell-bent on lowering the world's monster population. Imagine their online adventures peppered with the single worst soundtrack in PC gaming history. Welcome to the world of *Granado Espada*.

Like the glut of new reality TV shows, the MMORPG industry has descended into the hell of hybrids – MMORPG-FPSs (*Planetside*), MMORPG-space sims (*Eve*) and now, MMORPG-RTSs, which are in short supply (ignoring the atrocious *Dreamlords*). *Sword Of The New World: Granado Espada* combines bizarre Korean artwork with the combat of *Warcraft 3* mixed with *Baldur's Gate* to make a not-unpleasant experience.

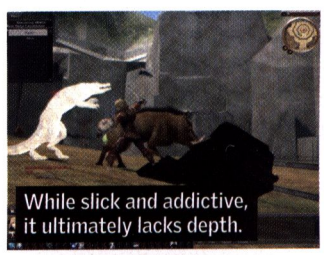
Levelling is a pedestrian affair – get quest, kill monster, level-up – but mixes it up by letting you control three independent characters within 'families', and since variety is the spice of life, they can be any of the generic MMO classes. This gives you a degree of flexibility on the battlefield – it even somewhat sheds the classic healer-tank-damage trifecta, with *Zelda*-style health points dropping from slain beasties. If you want, you can even group together into squads with other families, and enter chaotic raids á la every other MMO.

COVER YOUR EARS

The distinctly Korean styling of both the graphics and the music may turn off eager westerners (think the lovechild of Jamiroquai and Phillip Glass). Levelling is bogged down too by a weird mixture of the boring parts of history and *Final Fantasy* girly-men – but if you can get past it, there's fun to be had.

It's very much a bog-standard affair content-wise, but something about *Granado Espada* is fiendishly addictive. What stops it from being truly great is the fact that it's both simple and rather boring at times – great for short spates of play, but as an MMO, the grind becomes obvious in record time.

It's free to play up until level 20 – but you'll need a subscription if you want to carry on past that. If you want something a little different that won't blow you away with its depth, and can stomach the weird visuals, then *Granado Espada* may be for you. PCZ


While slick and addictive, it ultimately lacks depth.

AT A GLANCE...

Awkward Korean MMORPG-RTS, built with quirky ideas and quirkier visuals to make for a middling adventure.

Minimum system requirements:
1GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 64MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

SWORD OF THE NEW WORLD	70%
WORLD LINEAGE II	61%
DREAMLORDS	17%

PCZONE

Graphics	Smooth, but weird
Sound	Speed-jazz meets the baroque
Multiplayer	Of course

- Addictive
- Easy to get into
- Fun both solo & grouped
- Feels distinctly weird
- Same old MMORPG content included
- Not much depth

70
Worldly but not wise

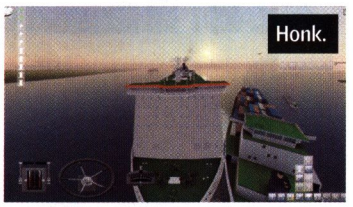

That's one horny boat.

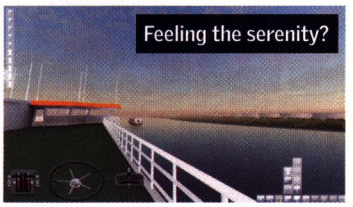
SHIP SIMULATOR 2008

I just drove my ferry into your yacht

DEVELOPER VSTEP
PUBLISHER Lighthouse Interactive
WEBSITE www.shipsim.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £34.99

Min system req:
2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM and a 128MB graphics card.


Honk.

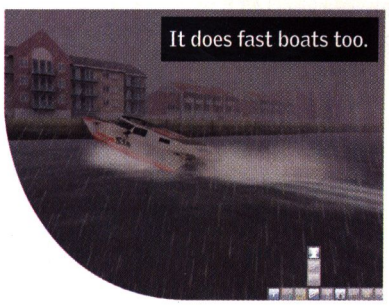

Feeling the serenity?

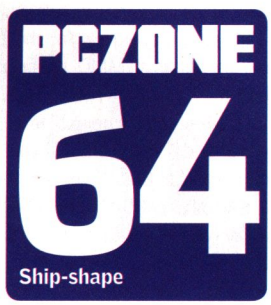
I'M A MASSIVE fan of progress bars. I love the way that 'minutes left' reports can drop minutes in seconds as the computer revises its estimate as it has a longer and more accurate sample to extrapolate from. My favourite is two progress bars at once, one for overall progress, and one for the current task. God, I love progress bars. An ex-boyfriend even indulged this ill fixation by writing a Visual Basic program that allowed me to spend a pre-determined amount of time watching a bewitching array of progress bars.

I'm sharing way too much, but there is a point. I love *Ship Simulator 2008*, but it's that same feeling. The big-boat missions are a ponderous progress bar, with dozens of informative numbers to distract you from the virtual inaction on-screen. Smaller boats are more immediate fun, and now there's speedboats; it's hardly *SSX Dumbyank Ramprider*, but it's a welcome change of pace.

It's slicker, more varied and better-looking than its predecessor, and it still does what it sets out to do very well indeed. I suppose the passionate niche market might be willing to spoon out £35 frigging quid, but as much as this is a classic of its genre, it goes without saying that genre is realistic ship simulation. So you can take 64 as a genuinely high compliment. Oh, and read the manual.

Jon Blyth


It does fast boats too.





DELAWARE ST JOHN: VOLUME 3 – THE SEACLIFF TRAGEDY

It's like being called Swindon De La Cruz

DEVELOPER Big Time Games
PUBLISHER Lighthouse Interactive
WEBSITE www.delawarestjohn.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £14.99

Min system req:
300MHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 16MB graphics card.

DELAWARE? YOU HAVE to love Americans and their patriotic child-naming conventions (as in habits, not literally large gatherings of people titling kids in stadiums). You wouldn't get that sort of nonsense from British parents, the Beckhams notwithstanding.

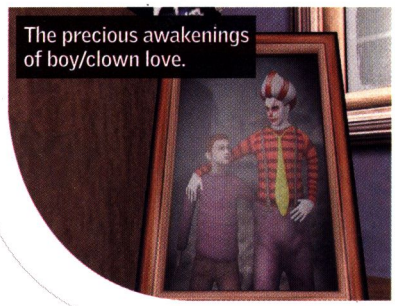
This is old-school adventuring, in a similar vein to the *Egypt* games (see p82): flick-screen, get object, use object, watch pre-rendered plot exposition, wonder about the futility of life and how you're wasting eternity's precious moments in front of such pointless wanderings through someone else's CV-building exercise. I play these games so you don't have to. But at least I get paid.

Chipping Sodbury and his cohorts are ghost-hunters basically, exploring a disused theme park, battling 'shadow people' and clown statues and unravelling the kind of mystery that would be laughed out of the *X-Files* writing rooms and even guffawed at by the *Scooby-Doo* scribblers. Think *Resi Evil* minus the fun, horror, gameplay and/or interest.

In its favour, it at least makes a stab at integrating the puzzles into the storyline, rather than just bolting some parlour games around animation sequences, and everyone involved is giving it their all. And the clowns are creepy, but that's true anywhere.

It's just so hindered by stilted and unnecessary adventure game clichés and unfriendly mechanics that the whole exercise is rendered null and void. Basingstoke Ponsonby-Smythe may have made it to three adventures by now, but unless he's going to be dragged into the modern gaming world soon, there's really not much point going for a fourth.

Paul Presley


The precious awakenings of boy/clown love.



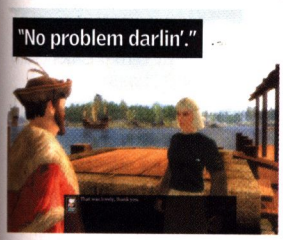

Time to ham it up.


I'd go for the green. It's definitely you.

THE GUILD 2: PIRATES OF THE EUROPEAN SEAS

Jon Blyth looked everywhere for a parrot, but couldn't find one

DEVELOPER 4Head Studios
PUBLISHER JoWooD
WEBSITE www.theguild2.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99


"No problem darlin'."

AT A GLANCE...

A standalone expansion to 2006's life-dynasty sim. Now you can fish, sell placebos as panaceas and have full-blown cannon battles on the sea.

Minimum system requirements:
1.8GHz processor, 512MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

THE SIMS 2	82%
THE GUILD 2: POTES	64%
THE GUILD 2	63%

HALF-LIFE, BIOSHOCK **and *The Guild 2* are all games with one thing in common: a crippling lack of sea-faring murderous dandies, and not one level where a stout man with an interesting and sexually inviting ginger beard uses his sword to slide down a sail.**

4Head, at least, have seen the screaming void of missed potential in their original title, and released this standalone expansion. Standalone because – perhaps – sales of the original would have made a requirement to own it commercial suicide over here. Nevertheless, if you've uninstalled *The Guild 2* or – god knows, maybe you never even bought it – this makes it a lot easier for everyone.

What this expansion does is take the world of *The Guild 2* onto the seas, so I'll describe *The Guild 2* first. It's the medieval life-sim where you balance your work life, love life and political aspirations. Work life involves producing and selling goods. Love life involves wooing suitors with perfume and compliments, getting married and sticking one gently in them. Politically, the most challenging aspect is to keep everyone sweet while you try to climb the ladder to be the mayor. Or, as the expansion allows, king of the freakin' world.

You'll die, but that's fine, as long as you've had children. They'll just take over your business and skills. A good few of the bugs have been fixed with this expansion – though far from all – but the problems with the gameplay remain. Too much micro-management with virtually zero autonomy and common sense – they don't even have sex unprompted – and an often unfriendly interface that even makes the tutorial an occasional pain in the arse.

The campaign starts you off as a humble farmer, with a fairly clever storyline that forces you naturally into doing everything you need to do. And once you're into the game, it unfolds with the same (*cough*, identical) charm as the previous title. This is an expansion and an improvement, it's still engaging and quirky. However, as pirates go, this has inherited the tired body of modern-day Brian Blessed rather than the nimble Errol Flynn of the '50s. PCZ

PCZONE

Graphics	Not desperately modern to be honest
Sound	Murderable voice-acting
Multiplayer	Solid and enjoyable

- ✓ Soft and absorbent
- ✓ Gently humorous
- ✓ Standalone
- ✗ More of the same
- ✗ Unintuitive controls remain
- ✗ Unapologetically Depp-less

64
Not enough pirates

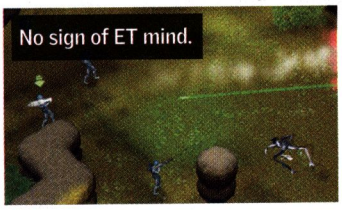

Up in smoke.

UFO: EXTRA-TERRESTRIALS

Extra! Extra! Alien clones sighted!

DEVELOPER Chaos Concept
PUBLISHER Paradox Entertainment
WEBSITE www.ufo-extraterrestrials.com
ETA Out now
PRICE €20 (£14)

Min system req:
1.5GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 128MB graphics card


No sign of ET mind.

SOME POET CHAPPY once said: "And the end of all our searching shall be to return to the place where we started and know it for the first time." That's a ridiculously pretentious start to anything, but the latest UFO plagiarism/tribute has brought us full circle. So cheers, TS Eliot.

After three clones by Cenega, *UFO: Extraterrestrials* is finally a nearly perfect imitation of *X-COM*. Yay!

So the game starts with some human-colonised alien world for you to defend, looking curiously like Earth. As this follows on from the first game, but assumes you lost rather than won, mankind is restricted to this last colonial backwater. Starting with one base, you've got to defend the world from the endless ghastly alien invaders. You do so in time-honoured *UFO* fashion, by shooting down saucers with planes, then sending in ground troops to kill or capture. Then you research the bits, build better stuff, expand across the globe and take the war to the enemy.

There are a few changes. First, it's near impossible for your soldiers to die. Unless you lose a mission, your dead soldiers are miraculously patched up. Second, the few cut-scenes are rubbish, compared to the delightful cartoony animations of the original. Third, they've changed the aliens and done a good job of it, so there's more variety to contend with.

This is really like playing *X-COM* for the first time again, except 15 years on. It's fun, tough, cheap and really hard to stop playing; sometimes it's good to look back.

Dan Griliopoulos


Hmmm, lush.

PCZONE 71
ET has come home


Like *Tron*, only not shit.

THREADSPACE: HYPERBOL

What the hell's a hyperbol?

DEVELOPER Iocaine Studios
PUBLISHER Atari
WEBSITE www.hyperbol.com
ETA Out now
PRICE $19.99 (£10 – via Steam)

Min system req:
1GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a DX9 graphics card

RECOMMENDED PCZONE RECOMMENDED

THE TROUBLE WITH space is it's all three-dimensional. You think you're doing pretty well in a scrap, and then it turns out there's an enemy Battlecruiser and 42 legions of their finest fighters descending on you from above.

ThreadSpace: Hyperbol does away with such unpleasantness by limiting play to a two-dimensional plane. Yes, you're a spaceship, but you slide about like some sort of rocket-powered game of intergalactic curling. This all works tremendously well mind you, and to the game's distinct advantage.

The crux here is 'team deathmatch on ice', played against others via the magic of the internet for control of various zones within the universe. You've got an array of occasionally unnecessary physics-based weaponry to pick from, which you can bounce and bend around corners in an effort to punch holes in your opponent's hull.

It's very tactical, it's highly polished and I can pretty much guarantee you've never played anything quite like it. That's where *ThreadSpace: Hyperbol's* main strength lies; it's so completely unique it's simply a joy working out how to play the damned thing, while the gameplay remains generally hectic-but-thrilling.

There's every possibility it's simply not your cup of tea and you'll become so enraged by the whole concept you'll eat your mouse. As such, while it gets a firm thumbs up from me, bear in mind that *ThreadSpace: Hyperbol* is the very epitome of try-before-you-buy...

Dan Marshall


My spaceship, HMS AWESOME.

PCZONE 75
Something a bit new



LUCINDA GREEN'S EQUESTRIAN CHALLENGE

Another old nag....



DEVELOPER Red Mile Entertainment
PUBLISHER Xplosiv
WEB www.redmileentertainment.com
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

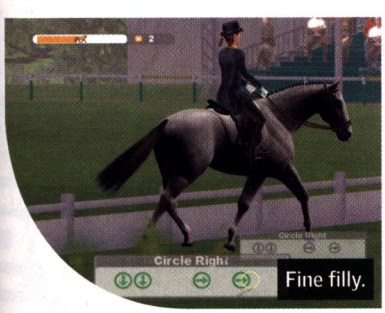
Min system req:
1.4GHz processor, 256MB RAM and a 32MB graphics card

FOR SOME BIZARRE reason, the genre that used to only have *Pippa Funnell* titles to look forward to (we feel for you horse lovers), has now attracted the attention of other jodhpur-sporting types. This time round it's Lucinda Green, who rather amusingly is the spawn of the late Major-General George Errol Prior-Palmer and Lady Doreen Hersey Winifred Hope. Phew! So quite why she's had to agree to a games deal, we're not sure. Maybe mummy and daddy are restricting access to her trust fund right now...

Forget learning anything useful about horses or having fun. The game's main thrust is its three events, one of which is a *Dance Dance Revolution*-style button-presser (which is somehow meant to represent the elegant art of dressage), and the other two are pretty much jumping events. Only, jumping requires you to press the button about 20ft before you expect to take off. Way to teach your kids good reactions.

Between events, there's such dull filler as brushing your horse! Feeding your horse! Patting your horse! Quite frankly, it's a bit insulting even for kids, especially when old dobbin over there already has water and food in his paddock but just can't be arsed to eat/drink for itself until you tell it to. Bah! Send him (and the game) to the dogmeat factory. It's the most humane thing you could do.

Suzy Wallace



PCZONE 14
Neigh good



PROJECT FASHION

Massive adventures in fashion

DEVELOPER Lexis Numerique
PUBLISHER Xplosiv
WEBSITE snipurl.com/project_fashion
ETA Out now
PRICE £19.99

Min system req:
1.2GHz processor, 256GB RAM and a 128MB graphics card



IF YOU CAME to fashion school because you thought it would be some kind of soft option, then get out now. The halls of this academy are littered with the corpses of those who thought fashion would be three years of glamourous knickers and trendy eating disorders.

Look to your left. Now look to your right. Half the people you just saw won't be graduating. Most of you will slice off your eyelids to prevent sleep – because there's simply no time to sleep at Fashion Academy. Unless you're going to dream about fashion, in which case pick up some prosthetic eyelids from the nurse.

Project Fashion teaches you everything a seven-year-old girl needs to know about the fashion industry. You'll dress up, decorate and photograph your pretty ladies, receiving tokens to spend on new-coloured lipsticks, and you'll research pretend books in the library to win new frocks. All this, and I haven't even mentioned the thrilling mystery of the sabotaged collection!

Project Fashion is a nice enough game that young girls might have enjoyed before they'd had their expectations raised by the far slicker *Sims 2*. It's clumsily executed (at one point I had three continue buttons on screen at once), awkward to play and you'll be manicuring some freaky-long fingers. In its defence, I got to scrawl obscenities in lipstick on the foreheads of thin women. And that's got to be worth something.

Jon Blyth



PCZONE 32
Shitty in pink

You won't find any of these Indie games in the shops, but you can download them or get trial versions on our DVD.

indiezone

PCZONE ON THE DVD

Martin Korda **makes peace, news and war in this month's Indie Zone...**

PEACEMAKER

INDIEZONE GAME OF THE MONTH

DEVELOPER Impact Games **WEBSITE** www.peacemakergame.com **PRICE** $19.95 (£10)

COULD YOU BRING peace to the Middle East? Want to find out? Well now you can with this cracking piece of strategy gaming edutainment that'll have you tugging out your hair in an attempt to balance the needs of two diametrically opposed factions blinded by centuries of hatred.

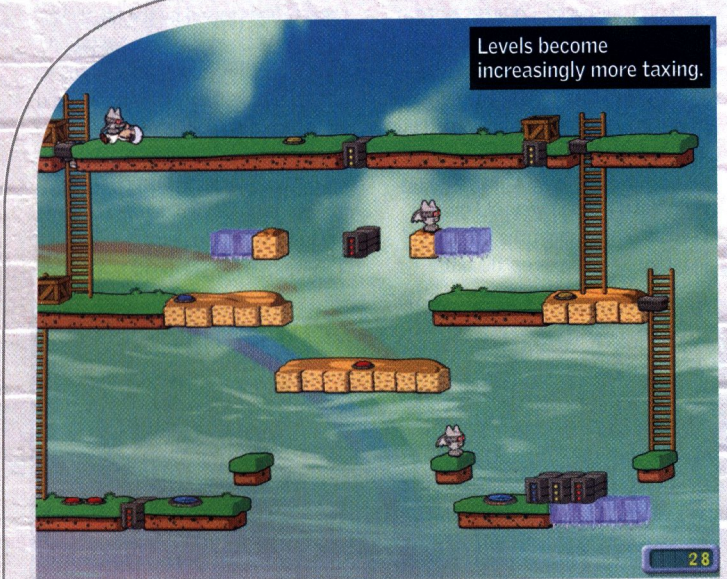
As either the head of Palestine or Israel, you must bring peace to the region. At your disposal is a stunning array of political, military and law-enforcement options, including the building of fences, missile strikes and speeches.

Embellished by powerful video footage of the region that gives the game a seriously lifelike feel and a wealth of variables that need balancing if peace is to be achieved, you must strike that ever elusive balance between appeasing both factions while ensuring that extremists are kept at bay.

While *PeaceMaker* is hampered somewhat by a lack of clarity (it's not always obvious what your actions have achieved), there's little else to criticise here. Timely, compelling, packed with features and slickly presented, this is a strategy game that not only stands out for its quality, but also for its bold and overall successful depiction of a real-life conflict that's confounded countless politicians. Top stuff.

PCZONE 81





PROFESSOR FIZZWIZZLE AND THE MOLTEN MYSTERY

DEVELOPER Grubby Games **WEBSITE** grubbygames.com **PRICE** £10.35

ONE FOR ALL the family, *Professor Fizzwizzle* is a genuinely charming platform puzzler, packed full of character and conundrums and simply teeming with polished, intelligently conceived levels.

You play as the eponymous spod, who's intent on studying an erupting volcano for reasons of scientific exploration and geekdom. However, after one of his former students scuppers his plans and has him banished to the far end of the island, he must navigate challenging levels in order to get back to the lava-spewing mountain.

Featuring ladders, trapdoors, pits, crates and enemies, levels prove both varied and increasingly more taxing. There's even a range of surfaces (ice, sand, grass etc), which affect how certain objects move, adding an extra strategic dimension to the proceedings.

Superbly animated and with three difficulty settings, this is one of the most versatile and gratifying indie puzzlers currently doing the rounds.

PCZONE 79

WAR WOUND

DEVELOPER Apothecary Studios
WEBSITE www.apothecarystudios.co.uk
PRICE €19.99 (£14)

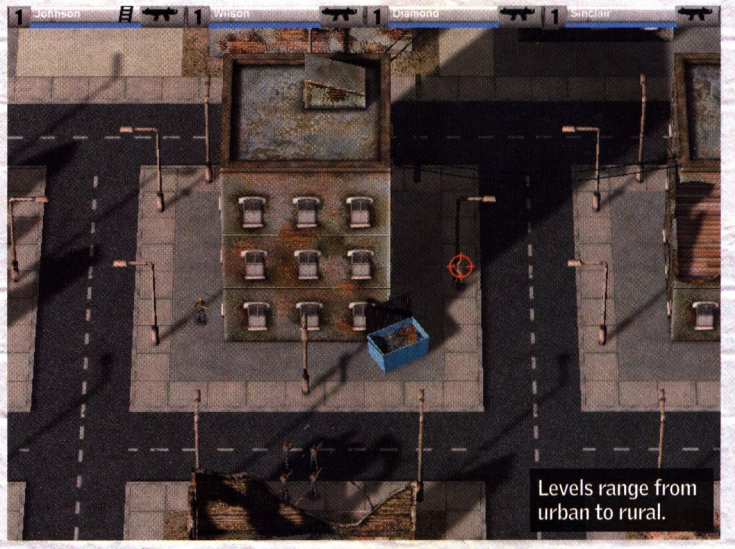
THIS ISOMETRIC BLASTER has clearly had a crack at bringing something original to the table, though on the whole, there's little here to get particularly moist about.

Controlling a squad of Special Forces soldiers, you must fight your way through a series of urban and rural locales. However, with a limited number of soldiers at your disposal for the course of the campaign and with each soldier possessing just one life, you have to think seriously about every move and attack in order to minimise casualties.

So far so good, but let's not get hasty, because *War Wound's* grainy visuals often make it hard to see what's going on. Throw in a lack of clarity about what the game is actually about, some atrocious pathfinding that sees your men getting stuck behind obstacles and separated, and you're left with an experience that's as frustrated as it is entertaining.

Had the glitches been ironed out, the visuals sharpened up and some kind of plot layered in, this could well have been highly entertaining. As it is, it's hardly MIA but it's also unlikely to win any medals.

PCZONE 55



Levels range from urban to rural.

BREAKING NEWS

DEV Mystery Studio **WEB** www.mysterystudio.com **PRICE** $19.95 (£10)



OSTENSIBLY A WORD search puzzle game wrapped in rudimentary management features, *Breaking News* is a fun if somewhat repetitive piece of programming that manages to do just about enough to capture your attention.

Kicking off in the 1950s, you take control of a fledgling news channel, which you must then build into the dominant force of current affairs broadcasting over the course of several decades. The premise is to match the words of news headlines on a sliding letter board before the limit expires. The more headlines you match, the higher your ratings and earnings will be, the latter of which can be spent on upgrading your studio and equipment.

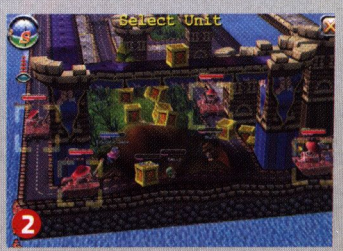
Entertaining in bursts, *Breaking News* is still a pretty standard word-search brainteaser, with the studio development segments little more than a footnote, while longevity proves about as enduring as a saucer of milk in the Sahara. Fun, but hardly headline news.

PCZONE 52

PCZONE TOP 5 INDIE GAMES



ROBOBLITZ
www.roboblitz.com
Reviewed issue 177
This stunning third-person action puzzler about a robot trying to defend a space cannon from attacking pirates is the highest scoring Indie Zone game we've ever had. Packed full of physics-based puzzles, excellent combat and jaw-dropping visuals thanks to Unreal Engine 3, you simply can't allow yourself to ignore this gem.



NAKED WAR
www.zee-3.com | Reviewed issue 177
A highly addictive and visually bold turn-based strategy game played via email in which your team of four soldiers must kill off the opposition with guile, tactics and some serious firepower.



MORNING'S WRATH
www.morningswrath.com | Reviewed issue 163
A superbly written, beautifully crafted isometric RPG that leads you on an epic adventure to save your land from destruction. A must-buy for any self-respecting RPG fan.



NEW STAR SOCCER 3
www.newstarsoccer.com | Reviewed issue 164
This novel take on the beautiful game melds *Sensible Soccer* with *Football Manager* and *Goal* (the film) to provide the most complete indie gaming footy experience available.



MR ROBOT
www.moonpod.com | Reviewed issue 181
Like an isometric *RoboBlitz* with zany RPG-style combat, you play a robot who must bring a malfunctioning starship back online. Packed with puzzles, great characters and humour.

BUDGET

On a ship or a plane, budget titles are all the same: cheap...

BUDGET GAME OF THE MONTH


"Ouch! Mind my head!"

HALF-LIFE 2 + ONE PACK

PUBLISHER: Steam **WEBSITE:** www.steampowered.com **PRICE:** $24.95 (£12)

IS THERE ANYBODY out there who hasn't played *Half-Life 2* and *Episode One* yet? Well, if you're that one person now admitting such gaming heresy, I implore you – stop reading the mag, download this pack from Steam and get playing. Come back only when you've completed it and we can look you in the eye again. OK?

Phew. Have they gone yet? Excellent. Well, as you probably know, *Half-Life 2* is a staggeringly good shooter sequel that again slips you into the HEV suit of Gordon Freeman, alongside the silent tormentor of the mysterious G-Man and the frightening Xen alien menace. Also in this collection is *Episode One* (the first expansion pack that sends you and the lovely Alyx back into the Citadel), Lost Coast (a short demo level to show off Valve's new HDR lighting effects) and *HL2 Deathmatch* (physics-based toilet-throwing mayhem).

Getting all that glorious PC gaming for just over 12 quid is almost insulting.

Jamie Sefton

PCZONE 93


Take the silly mask off.


"What now?"


Kraftwerk's new video.


She'd asked for a shotgun. This hadn't started well.

THIS MONTH PCZONE SAVED MONEY BY...

Steve finding money in the dryer:
Saving: £5



Suzy buying nearly out-of-date sausages:
Saving: 30p



Clare buying a half-price sandwich every morning for a week:
Saving: £6.50



DARK MESSIAH: MIGHT & MAGIC

PUBLISHER: Steam **WEBSITE:** www.steampowered.com **PRICE:** $19.95 (£10)

RELEASED LATE LAST year, *Dark Messiah* was the fantasy game that did brutal, gory first-person hack-and-slash properly. While it lacked the role-playing depth of Bethesda's RPG 2006 smash *Oblivion*, Arkane Studios used Valve's gorgeous Source engine to full effect, allowing you to push enemies off cliffs, set them on fire or skewer them on spikes.

As well as sword-wielding, you can also power-up with magical spells, that include being able to shrink foes and step on them like ants. Hilarious.

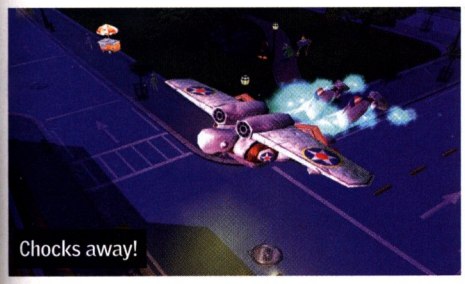
Dark Messiah does have an annoying tendency to lead you by the hand too much, and some of the environmental traps are a little predictable. However, it's worth the money to see the look on an orc's face as you poke a sword into it.

Jamie Sefton

PCZONE 82


Look! Headstand!


Look! I can bogle!



Chocks away!



Eat your heart out, *Heroes*.

FREEDOM FORCE VS THE 3RD REICH

PUBLISHER: Xplosiv **WEBSITE:** www.xplosiv.net **PRICE:** £9.99

WHEN YOU FIRST APPROACH it, *The 3rd Reich* is like an in-joke spread throughout a game, tailored for a specific audience and not necessarily the resounding 'ting!' of the cash register. As you settle deeper into its comic-book stylings, ludicrous storylines and wonderful characters though (newcomers including Biggles-style Brit hero Blackjack and French resistance fighter Tricolour), you begin to realise that it's also an accomplished and engaging action-RPG to boot.

Is it worth playing? Well, if we're getting metaphorical, then both iterations of *FF* are a roaring fire, comfy slippers and a mug of 'proper' Yorkshire tea. But to purchase is also to be a part of an exclusive members club – where tales of Man-bot and Alchemiss are understood and warmly acknowledged rather than fervently ignored. It's rough around the edges, but if ever a game had more simple development love running freely out of its occasional gap in gameplay, then I'd like to hear about it.

Will Porter

PCZONE 80

THE SHIP

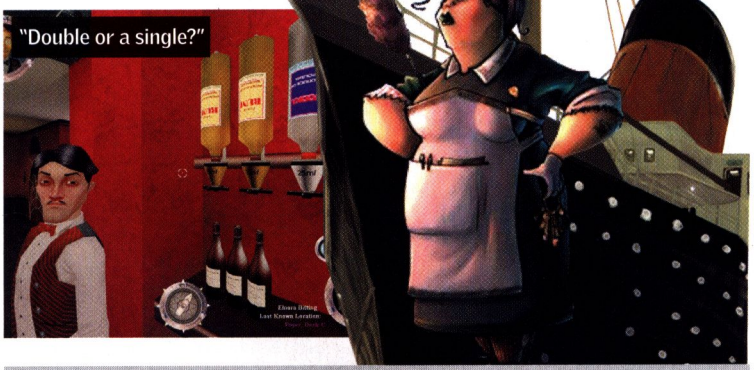
PUBLISHER Focus Multimedia **WEBSITE** www.focusmm.co.uk **PRICE** £9.99

BIRTHED FROM THE womb of a novel *Half-Life* mod, this Source-y commercial version packs your bags and ships you off onboard a 1920s cruise liner. But you're not there just to get pissed and puke into the sea. No, instead you're tasked with murdering one of your fellow passengers. Sounds simple, doesn't it? But every other passenger has their own target too.

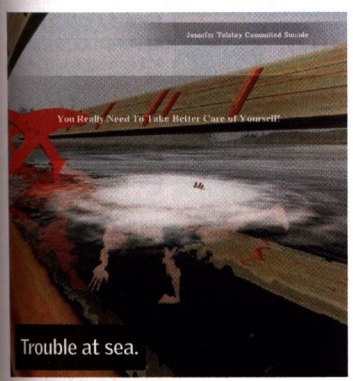
You'll have to commit your crime stealthily though, while at the same time watching your back and finding a suitable weapon. Plus, you can only discover who people are by getting up close, which all adds up to definite tension in this quaint game. Yes, single-player's pretty rubbish, but it still beats going on an easyCruise ship.

Suzy Wallace

PCZONE 70



"Double or a single?"



Trouble at sea.

And the rest...

Old games + cheap prices = budget heaven (or hell)



THE MOVIES: STUNTS & EFFECTS
$19.95 (£10), STEAM
Let's face it, stunts are great. We don't want to hear actors talking, we want to see them falling through windows and breaking bones. And that's exactly what you can do here. As well as making a giant, city-terrorising dog. Genius.

PCZONE 78



SPELLFORCE 2: SHADOW WARS
£9.99, XPLOSIV
Sausages and mash. Sonny and Cher. Pete Doherty and drugs. Like peas in a pod – or genres in *SpellForce*. While the original didn't quite nail the RTS and RPG mix, this sequel improved matters, leading to a well-balanced and pretty mix-up of genres.

PCZONE 75



PARAWORLD
£9.99, XPLOSIV
Dinosaurs kick arse. Not when they're biting our heads off mind, but when they're picking on someone else. But here, instead of biting and chomping, they nuzzle until enemies die. Besides that, there's a pretty engine and fairly ordinary gameplay.

PCZONE 70

PCZONE TOP 5 BUDGET BUYS



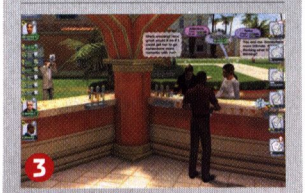
1

FAR CRY
£9.99, MASTERTRONIC
Better than *HL2*? So some say. The best non-gravity gun shooter of recent years anyway. An island paradise with extra explosions and terrific enemy AI.



2

THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
£4.99, MASTERTRONIC
Bethesda's classic free-roaming RPG now offers the cheapest goblin-bashing around. Essential stuff.



3

THE MOVIES
£9.99, ACTIVISION BEST OF RANGE
A great movie studio management title that transcends the genre by also offering a raft of brilliant film-making tools. Homemade machinima ahoy!

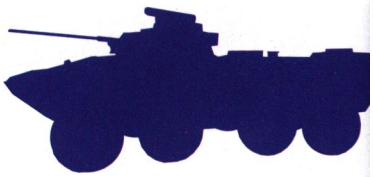


ROME: TOTAL WAR
£9.99, GSP WHITE LABEL
Long-term chart-topper, *Rome: TW*'s glorious real-time battles feature thousands of units hacking each other to bits. A bloody must-buy.



PSYCHONAUTS
$19.95 (£9.99), STEAM
Brilliant humour, creative level design and a range of psychic powers propel this title into the stratosphere of platformers.

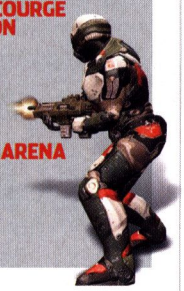
BUYER'S GUIDE



The bestest games your money can buy...

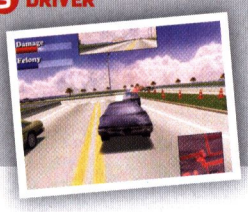
PCZONE TOP 5 GAMES BEGINNING WITH 'Q'

1. QUAKE II (ISSUE 59)
2. QUAKE (ISSUE 43)
3. QUAKE: SCOURGE OF AMAGON (ISSUE 49)
4. QUAKE 4 (ISSUE 162)
5. QUAKE III: ARENA (ISSUE 86)



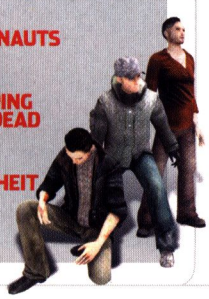
PCZONE TOP 5 MOST WORN-OUT FRANCHISES

1. LEISURE SUIT LARRY
2. MICRO MACHINES
3. CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER
4. EVERQUEST
5. DRIVER



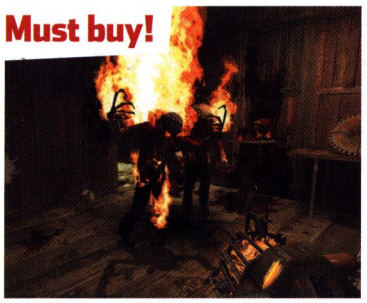
PCZONE TOP 5 MOST ORIGINAL GAME CONCEPTS

1. DEFCON (ISSUE 174)
2. GRIM FANDANGO (ISSUE 71)
3. PSYCHONAUTS (ISSUE 156)
4. THE TYPING OF THE DEAD (ISSUE 99)
5. FAHRENHEIT (ISSUE 159)



Shooters

Must buy!



HALF-LIFE 2
PCZ Issue: 148 – 97%
Everyone knew this would be good, but no-one quite expected the tour de force that Valve managed to pull off. Easily a contender for the best game of all time, *Half-Life 2* is just one stunning set-piece after another, and is guaranteed to leave you dribbling with awe. Be warned though, a (fast) online connection is needed for Valve's mandatory Steam delivery service.



BATTLEFIELD 2
PCZ Issue: 157 – 94%
If it's online action you want, look no further. *BF2* sets the gold standard for team-based shooting, with huge 64-player maps, squad and commander modes and the best graphics ever. Just make sure you have a ninja PC.

BUDGET

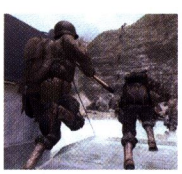


FAR CRY
PCZ Issue: 140 – 93%
In many eyes, Crytek's shooter outweighs even the mighty *Half-Life 2* in its tension, tactics and expansive level design. It's a mighty achievement with seemingly freeform action and the best sniping money can buy.

BUDGET



HL2: EPISODE ONE
PCZ Issue: 170 – 91%
Suffering slightly from thematic overlap from *HL2*, *Ep One* nevertheless contains the greatest moments from the entire *HL* series. Warm, funny and thrilling, it may be short, but the first five minutes are worth the entry fee alone.



CALL OF DUTY 2
PCZ Issue: 162 – 91%
Brutal, relentless and totally gripping, the WWII shooter sequel packs more action into a single level than most pack into an entire game. Epic scale battles and intense drama. World War II at its unforgiving best.



F.E.A.R.
PCZ Issue: 160 – 90%
With more shocks and scares than an episode of *Rentaghost* (and a much higher body count), *F.E.A.R.* pushes the shooter part of FPS to the limit. It might not be the scariest game ever, but it will make you jump.



STALKER: SHADOW OF CHERNOBYL
PCZ Issue: 179 – 85%
Despite being a bit on the late side, *STALKER* remains a fantastic outing for PC shooters with its unique setting, great action and genuine attempt to do something new.

Strategy

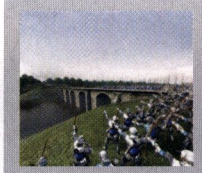
Must buy!



COMPANY OF HEROES
PCZ Issue: 173 – 93%
The fact that *Company Of Heroes* has knocked *Rome: Total War* from its strategy throne is testament enough to how utterly refined and slick it is. Relic have taken the best bits from strategy games and stripped out the crap, leaving you with a game that's fun, intelligent, accessible, taxing, tactical and exciting. And with that many positive words in one sentence, you know it must be good. Essential.



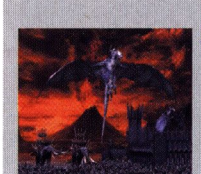
CIVILIZATION IV
PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%
A Buyer's Guide without a *Civ* game would be a sorry, sorry place, and luckily the latest version does the business with aplomb. Violent Buddhist Romans take over the world.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR
PCZ Issue: 175 – 91%
A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and whooping with delight as your many warriors spectacularly collide head-on with your opponents' armies. History was never this much fun at school.



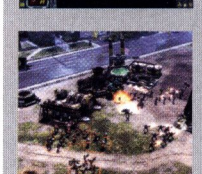
RISE OF NATIONS: RISE OF LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 168 – 91%
Takes the great gameplay of *RON*, improves on it with elements from *Civ IV* and *Total War* and wraps the whole lot in a gorgeous sci-fi setting. An RTS bursting with innovation and imagination.



LOTR: THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH
PCZ Issue: 149 – 91%
Although the *LOTR* RTS doesn't hold a candle to the *Total War* franchise, there's nothing quite like ordering a Balrog around for guaranteed strategy fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER
PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%
Massive battles and huge armies comprising of thousands of air, sea and land units? Tick. Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? Tick. One of the most unique RTS titles around? Tick.



C&C3: TIBERIUM WARS
PCZ Issue: 180 – 86%
A modern-day rehash of the old-school *Command & Conquer* formula we all know and love, but with polished visuals, the triumphant return of the FMV and an excellent new faction. A play is most certainly in order.

Action/Adventure

Must buy!



MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE
PCZ Issue: 136 – 93%
The chosen poison for certain *PCZ* staffers after a long hard day, Payne's second outing is perhaps the most pixel-perfect example of joy-through-excessive-destruction on the market. Slicker than slick, breathtaking and quite beautiful, *Max Payne 2* provides the greatest gaming kicks that money can buy. It's extremely short, but so tense, well designed and replayable that you just won't care.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS
PCZ Issue: 155 – 92%
To think that the simple top-down car game has turned into this – a work of creative genius. Violent, brutal, smutty freeform and hilarious – *San Andreas* is the summit of gaming achievement.

BUDGET



SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY
PCZ Issue 154 – 91%
A tour de force from Ubisoft, *Chaos Theory* takes the *Splinter Cell* format and runs with it in solo, co-op and the now well-established spies vs mercs multiplayer. Smooth, lithe and good with a knife.



FAHRENHEIT
PCZ Issue: 159 – 90%
Murder most foul, with you as the killer. This twisting, turning, brilliantly-told plot features multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings. From the brains behind *The Nomad Soul*.

BUDGET



PSYCHONAUTS
PCZ Issue: 156 – 90%
Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and absolutely off its rocker – *Psychonauts* is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.

BUDGET



BEYOND GOOD & EVIL
PCZ Issue: 138 – 89%
We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.

BUDGET



PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES
PCZ Issue: 164 –86%
The shirtless wonder finally makes it into the Buyer's Guide. Not that any of his outings can be considered bad games, but *TTT* manages to get all the ingredients just right this time around.

MMOs

Must buy!



WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PCZ Issue: 152 – 95%
Blizzard's recreation of the classic strategy world in MMO form doesn't disappoint. Beautiful to look at, absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a magic stick at.



EVERQUEST II
PCZ Issue: 150 – 95%
A *Star Trek* to *WOW*'s *Star Wars*, *EQII* gives the original a much needed lick of paint, a whole new world to play in and a greater sense of depth and immersion. A time-sink in the true, classic sense.



GUILD WARS
PCZ Issue: 156 – 94%
How to make a gaming genre accessible to the masses. It shines with polish, thought and lack of monthly subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home too, thanks to a totally skills-based set-up.



EVE ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 130 – 88%
Elite online has been a long-held fantasy and this space sim is the closest yet to making it a reality. Its slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining or trading to piracy – it's up to you.



LOTR ONLINE
PCZ Issue: 182 – 87%
A near-perfect representation of Tolkien's stories, with solid combat and engaging plots, all bound up in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! The whole of Middle-earth awaits...

Simulation

Must buy!



X3: REUNION
PCZ Issue: 162 – 92%
Finally, a space sim to better *X2: The Threat*, and it just happens to be the sequel. Possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Plus, it plays well too.



IL-2 STURMOVIK: FORGOTTEN BATTLES
PCZ Issue: 128 – 92%
While flight sims are becoming rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None more so than this ultra-classy WWII combat sim. Chocks away, comrade!

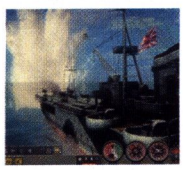


MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 – 89%
This latest iteration in the *Flight Sim* series is the biggest since they started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.

BUDGET



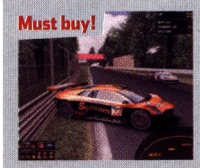
FREELANCER
PCZ Issue: 128 – 84%
If *X2* is too slow for you, *Freelancer* should fit the bill. Plenty of trading, bounty-hunting and space piracy, but with the emphasis on action rather than realism. Space has never been this much fun.



SILENT HUNTER 4: WOLVES OF THE PACIFIC
PCZ Issue: 181 – 82%
If a life beneath the waves tickles your fancy, then this submarine simulator fits the bill. Tactics, torpedos, sonar and sailors combine to make the ultimate ship sinker.

Driving/Racing

Must buy!



GTR2
PCZ Issue: 173 – 92%
Can't afford a Ferrari? Then pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams, complete with an improved driving model, new modes and many other improvements.



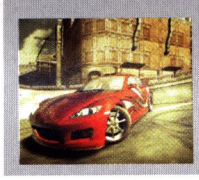
GT LEGENDS
PCZ Issue: 161 – 92%
While *GTR* takes care of modern-day racing, *GT Legends* does the business for historical driving. A natural successor to *Grand Prix Legends*, it's like the swinging '60s never ended.



LIVE FOR SPEED
PCZ Issue: 158 – 90%
Online racing at its best. Realistic handling, hilarious crashes and a racing community second to none. On the right servers that is. A remarkable achievement by such a small team.



COLIN MCRAE: DIRT
PCZ Issue: 183 – 88%
The rallying legend returns and this time he's joined by a host of other off-road events, an excitable Travis Pastrana and some of the best-looking graphics to grace any driving game on PC so far.



NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED
PCZ Issue: 163 – 88%
Thrill-packed racer from EA, this time with the emphasis on high-speed police chases and notoriety factors. You can still make like Westwood with the car pimping though.

God games

Must buy!



THE MOVIES
PCZ Issue: 162 – 95%
Life as a movie mogul, games don't get better than this. Not only a god/management game par excellence, but also a complete home movie-making kit. Brilliant.



BLACK & WHITE 2
PCZ Issue: 161 – 93%
The original split opinion, and this sequel does the same. We love it though, and think it's erased all the problems as well as adding plenty of new options to boot. It's gorgeous too.



GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%
While it might not strictly be a god game, *Garry's Mod* gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source Engine, from functional robots to saucy ragdoll jegs. Try it out and see for yourself.

BUDGET



EVIL GENIUS
PCZ Issue: 147 – 84%
Ever wanted to say "No Mr Bond, I expect you to die", or create giant evil lairs inside hollow volcanoes? Well now you can with this great megalomaniac sim. It's always fun being bad.

BUDGET



VEGA$: MAKE IT BIG
PCZ Issue: 135 – 84%
An in-depth tycoon game with all the 3D graphical glitz and glamour of Vegas itself. Provide hotels, casinos and over-priced magic shows that suck the money out of the punters.

Sport

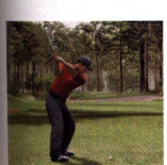
Must buy!



FOOTBALL MANAGER 2007
PCZ Issue: 175 – 90%
Still reigning supreme as one of the most popular ways to fritter away the hours, the latest edition of *FM* has tons of improvements. The best footy management title.



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 6
PCZ Issue: 175 – 88%
Konami's arcade kickabout is the best yet, with improved AI, fantastic animation and enhanced multiplayer. Not the Xbox 360 version, but still better than *FIFA* – just.



TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2006
PCZ Issue: 161 – 85%
Not the most recent version but still our favourite, *Tiger 2006* has you time-travelling as Mr Woods. The best PC golf game yet, mainly thanks to the two career modes.



FIFA 07
PCZ Issue: 174 – 84%
EA's come up trumps with the latest *FIFA*. *PES*-style controls, great ball physics and a decent management option combine with EA's usual top presentation to make this the best *FIFA* yet.



NHL 06
PCZ Issue: 160 – 84%
Ice hockey may not be the UK's number-one sporting pastime, but that doesn't make this *06* incarnation of it any less fun. Exciting, breathless and violent balls-out fun for the whole family.

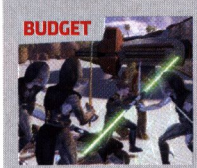
Role-playing games

Must buy!



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION
PCZ Issue: 167 – 95%
Oblivion's sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard to enjoy RPGs.

BUDGET



KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC
PCZ Issue: 137 – 94%
KOTOR is the best *Star Wars* game of recent years. Moving, dramatic and fairly adult in tone, it also has a hefty dose of lightsabers to keep you happy.

BUDGET



THE ELDER SCROLLS III: MORROWIND
PCZ Issue: 116 – 94%
Possibly the most intimidating, yet wonderful game we've played – the breadth and depth of *Morrowind* remains a remarkable achievement.

BUDGET



DEUS EX
PCZ Issue: 93 – 94%
This remains the benchmark in FPS RPGs. Twisting sci-fi plots, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama help retain *Deus Ex* as the alpha male of the gaming world.



NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2
PCZ Issue: 176 – 86%
An identical twin to *NWN* but using modern technology, *NWN2* has all the gleeful D&D levelling we love, plus tons of modding opportunities. If you have a beard, this is for you.

INCOMING!

All approximate monthly dates are correct at the time of going to press

Q3

ARMA: QUEEN'S GAMBIT	505 GAMES
BIOSHOCK	2K GAMES
BLACKSITE	MIDWAY
CALL OF DUTY 4: MODERN WARFARE	ACTIVISION
CLIVE BARKER'S JERICHO	CODEMASTERS
COMPANY OF HEROES: OPPOSING FRONTS	THQ
CRYSIS	EA
EMPIRE EARTH III	VIVENDI GAMES
ENEMY TERRITORY: QUAKE WARS	ACTIVISION
FLATOUT: ULTIMATE CARNAGE	EMPIRE
GUILD WARS: EYE OF THE NORTH	NCSOFT
HELLGATE: LONDON	EA
KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN	EIDOS
LEFT 4 DEAD	VALVE
MEDAL OF HONOR: AIRBORNE	EA
MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR – KINGDOMS	SEGA
MOTOGP 07	THQ
NEVERWINTER NIGHTS 2: MASK OF THE BETRAYER	ATARI
OBSCURE II	PLAYLOGIC
PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE: AMBITION OF THE ILLUMINUS	SEGA
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 8	KONAMI
SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER	CODEMASTERS
SEGA RALLY	SEGA
SPEEDBALL 2	FROGSTER INTERACTIVE
SPIDER-MAN: FRIEND OR FOE	ACTIVISION
STRANGLEHOLD	MIDWAY
TIMESHIFT	VIVENDI GAMES
TWO WORLDS	SOUTHPEAK INTERACTIVE
UNIVERSE AT WAR: EARTH ASSAULT	SEGA
WORLD IN CONFLICT	VIVENDI GAMES

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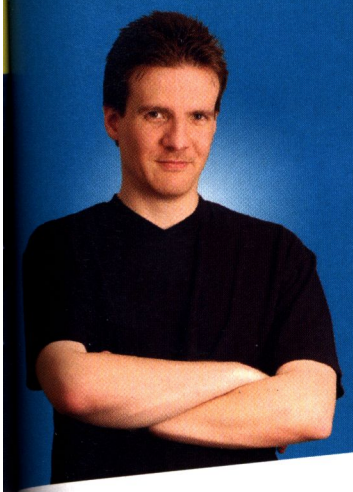
PLUS
FAR CRY 2
FIRST SCREENS AND INFO ON THIS AWESOME SHOOTER SEQUEL

AND
MEDIEVAL: II KINGDOMS REVIEWED

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NEW ISSUE OUT NOW!



Kill them!

I HAD A FANTASTIC game of *Battlefield 1942* the other weekend, memorable for the simple reason that everyone on the server was a bit average.

Just a handful of us are left playing DICE's trailblazer these days, most players having been mugged into buying so many pointless expansion packs and coma-inducing sequels that they ended up with no money to buy food and so starved and later died.

Anyone still alive is either a hardened veteran who spends every waking hour honing their skills so that they're now able to fire rockets that catapult victims into the path of grenades they'd dropped while hot-dogging their Spitfire under a low bridge, or is a casual (ie, poo) player like me.

Sadly, most *BF1942* maps have at least one veteran in them, and their abilities so dwarf those of everyone else combined that the best strategy – even for their own team-mates – is to spawn and then hide at the back of an aircraft hangar. When they get bored pwning nubs and leave to finish their physics homework, everyone crawls out and has fun again.

Now that Valve are getting big-hitter publishers onboard, it can't be long before most of the popular shooters are on Steam – a system which knows how long people have been playing, how they rank alongside others and so with whom they're allowed to battle. It all might become enjoyable again...

Phil Wand, hardware editor

CORE 2 HEROES

Firmware updates allow popular ASUS boards to run next-generation bus speeds

DESPITE THE FACT that Intel's older P965 and 975X chipsets do not support the latest 1333MHz processors, ASUS has released simple BIOS updates for many of their more popular boards which allow them to handle speeds beyond officially sanctioned limits.

The company now has capacity to produce a staggering two million motherboards every month, so the move is likely to impress a large number of ASUS users who will suddenly find they no longer need to upgrade their platform to take advantage of the E6x50 and QX6x50 processors and their higher bus speeds.

While Intel's current range of 1333MHz chips aren't noticeably faster than their 1066MHz counterparts, the higher speed is where things are heading – you'll be shopping for PC3-10600 (DDR3-1333) memory soon to help fill next year's products that feature a whopping 6MB of L2 cache.

In a statement, ASUS were keen to stress how this move shows they're keeping in step with the latest developments. "We will always provide hardware and firmware updates for optimal Core 2 Extreme/Core 2 Duo 1333FSB performance and functionality. In addition, more Core 2 Extreme/Core2 Duo 1333FSB-ready ASUS motherboards will be announced very soon." www.asus.com



ASUS have pledged 1332FSB support for boards like the P5W DH Deluxe.

UPGRADE LAUGH

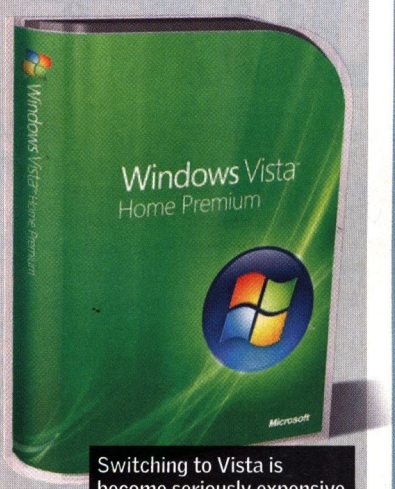
Developers cashing in on Vista...

WHILE THE NEW Windows works with a wide range of hardware and software, many developers are releasing upgraded 'Vista-compatible' products and are charging for them.

Photoshop CS2 is the most famous example, with Adobe explaining the need for a $199 upgrade because: "Creative Suite 2 was released almost two years before Vista became publicly available, and it's not recommended you use it."

Norton SystemWorks and Acronis True Image are just two examples of other products requiring paid-for upgrades before they work under Vista. It all adds significantly to the cost of leaving XP.

www.microsoft.com



Switching to Vista is become seriously expensive.

NEWS ROUND-UP

Despite haemorrhaging more money than Elton John in a frock shop, AMD's share of the global processor market has remained almost unchanged this last quarter, at around 12%. It also posted higher revenues. With Intel likely to cut the price of its quad-core products, analysts are predicting that Advanced Micro will not be showing a profit until some time late in 2009. www.amd.com

John Carmack has stated that add-in physics processors such as the PhysX will be redundant once games developers take full advantage of today's multi-core CPUs and GPUs. Although since id Software have made nothing but rubbish for the last decade, it's presumptuous of him to think anyone's listening. idsoftware.com

WARNING: THIS MONTH'S HARD WORDS

BY STEVE HOGARTY

HDCP: A cable that inexplicably makes things look rubbish on your expensive new TV because, at some point, you stopped fighting The Man. **iDea:** Rather than sticking an arbitrary letter in front of a word like the hard-working Steve Jobs, Aspire have just taken a word that already begins with 'i' and formatted it like the word 'iPod'. Laaaazy. **Striker Extreme:** This is the secret phrase that Roy of the Rovers whispered into his boots before every match. **ASUS:** The holiest components manufacturer, because it's almost the word Jesus. Especially if you say Jesus with some Spanish flair, like 'haysoos', then you're basically saying ASUS.

EVERY SILVER LINING...

I'd like to make two complaints. First, the 'Download drivers' link on the AMD website is on the far right, meaning if you've just installed the card and have desktop icons the size of fag packets, it's right off the edge of the screen. In comparison, the same link on the NVIDIA site is the first and most obvious thing. Second, ATI's setup program – which takes ten times longer to run than NVIDIA's – caused my screen to go blank for the entire period the drivers were being installed, and anyone less patient/more clueless would have simply reset the PC. I was also furious that ATI are now bundling free junk you don't want, like game offers and screensavers. We all hate it, so why do it?



RX2600XT

PRICE £99 **MANUFACTURER** MSI **WEBSITE** msicomputer.co.uk

I'VE OFTEN THOUGHT how nice it would be to write about cars for a living, perhaps with holiday reviews and ice cream tasting as a sideline. I'd get to compare Maseratis with Bentleys, Atlantic coasts with Pacific beaches, and then kick back to see how much raspberry ripple I could cram into my face before getting a headache.

Each of my chosen subjects would offer up an experience alive with difference and variation, thus making the task of writing about them much easier than, say, writing about video cards, all of which are the bloody same.

Today's cards are built using the same parts to the same specifications, and all of them do the same things – albeit at dissimilar speeds. Like PC components they're rather dull when viewed in isolation, meaning it's just a minority of brainsick gamers – you and me – who even know that they exist.

So it's always nice to be presented with something that's a bit out of the ordinary, because there's less of a need to fuss over tiny changes in benchmark scores that aren't noticeable in everyday use anyway.

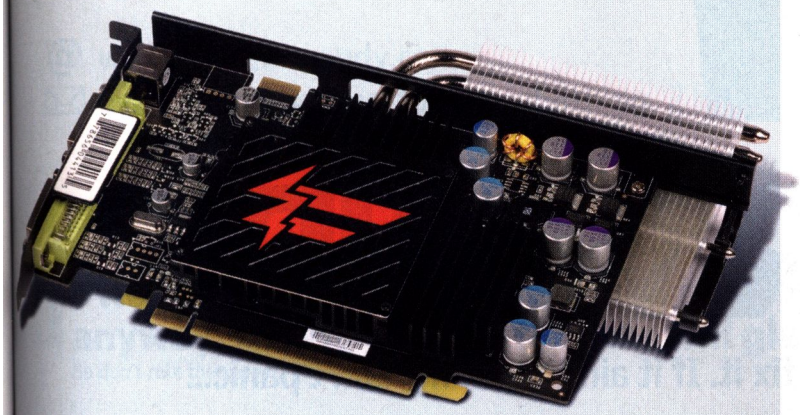
UGLY RADDY

On the face of it, MSI's Radeon 2600 XT is not an ordinary card. It's a compact, silent arrangement, and unlike the similarly powerful X1950 Pro, doesn't require any additional power nor a massive aluminium sink and cheeky 'noiseless' fan to work. It's also an awkward yet strangely attractive design in that Forth Bridge kind of way.

In addition, the 2600 XT is a proper 512MB DX10 card available for £100, making it the same price as the slower 256MB GeForce 8600 GT (see opposite), and cheaper than our old favourite X1950 Pro. Which one you pick boils down to little more than availability and allegiance, but if you pushed me to make a choice I'd go with the Raddy as it's a respectable performer in both DX9 and DX10.

The 2600 XT is also HDCP-compliant and provides HDMI output via a smart adaptor on one of the two DVI outputs. This means that you can connect your rig directly to an HD-ready LCD or plasma in your lounge and enjoy slumped-on-the-sofa high-definition gaming or rights-protected content complete with audio but without any mucking about.

PCZONE 87



8600 GT FATALITY

PRICE £110 **MANUFACTURER** XFX **WEBSITE** xfxforce.co.uk

THE FATAL1TY VERSION of the 8600 GT wears a silent heatpipe and has DX9 performance that's ahead of its rival 2600 XT.

It's a more expensive card than the Radeon, and XFX have pre-overclocked the clocks beyond standard NVIDIA speeds – benchmark scores are close to that of the 8600 GTS but without the price penalty. And it's noticeably faster than the old 7600 GT.

Like the 2600 XT, it's an honest mainstream product, ideal for that HTPC you might be considering for the lounge, but not something from which you should expect quad-digit frame-rates when configured to run at 22-inch widescreen resolution and high detail. That's not what it's about.

A word of warning though: unlike its rival Radeon, the Fatal1ty has no support for HDCP. It's not an issue for gaming, but if you're wanting a noise-free media centre, be aware that it doesn't do DRM.

PCZONE 80



8800 GTS 640MB

PRICE £270 **MANUFACTURER** PNY **WEBSITE** pny-europe.com

THE 'DOUBLE MEMORY' GTS is overlooked for two reasons: the cost of putting 640MB on the card keeps its retail price close to £300, and the 320MB version is not noticeably slower.

Since you can now buy 320MB variants from manufacturers such as Club 3D, EVGA and GIGABYTE for little more than £170, lashing out that extra £100 for a PNY – identical in every way except for the RAM, NVIDIA having replaced the original card's 512MB chips with 256MB ones – had really better be worth it.

And sadly, it's not. It's fundamentally an awesome card – the GTS always was – but at this price point it doesn't make a great deal of sense. There was a time when the extra RAM made an impact in games like *F.E.A.R.*, but testing the two against each other just recently, there's hardly anything in it. So my advice would be to save your pennies.

PCZONE 72

MEDIA CENTRE CONTROLBOARD

PRICE £50 **MANUFACTURER** SPEED-LINK **WEBSITE** powerdrive-computers.com



HAVING TAKEN THE plunge – actually, belly-flop would be a more appropriate term – and bought an Aspire iDea 510, I soon found myself falling out with Acer's own keyboard.

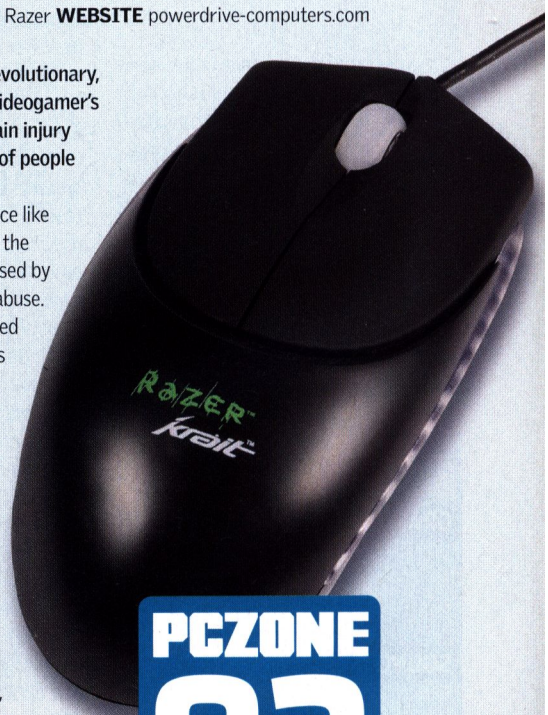
Aside from there being no Media Center-specific buttons, the touch-pad mouse is plain wrong for this sort of setup. Given that any PC in your lounge will soon become a home hub for pizza ordering, YouTube viewings and parlour games, the repetitive flick-flick movements afforded by the pad soon become a handicap. And it's taken only a month for the paint to wear off.

Enter this, a German-made alternative with an integrated trackball that allows Mrs Wandy to play games such as *Minesweeper* without flat-spotting her index finger. No, it doesn't have the truly serious MCE integration of rivals like Microsoft's own Remote Keyboard, but it's £20 cheaper, smaller, and is a better all-in-one solution for sofa surfers.

PCZONE 88

KRAIT

PRICE £30 **MANUFACTURER** Razer **WEBSITE** powerdrive-computers.com

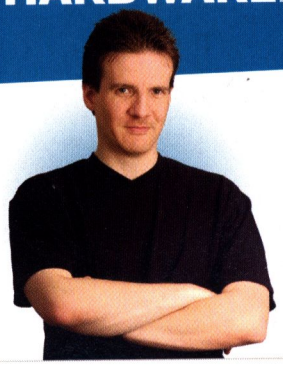


IT'S OLD AND not that revolutionary, but it did help ease my videogamer's thumb – a repetitive strain injury caused by repetitive shooting of people on the internet.

The design of 'enthusiast' mice like Logitech's MX1000 aggravates the discomfort in my first digit caused by decades of prolonged mouse abuse. The problem is that the sculpted edge of modern rodents causes those of us with long fingers and thumbs to adopt unnatural shapes with our hands, which is when the pain builds up.

The Krait has the same responses and tactile quality as its curvier counterparts, only with a simpler, more traditional design that encourages you to rest your hand, same as the first Boomslang did. It's high-quality, natural to use, comes with a long cable and is perfectly accurate – though I suppose how good you are in games is down to you, not the mouse. I'm still awesome at *Team Fortress Classic*.

PCZONE 82



DEAR WANDY

If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't working, don't panic...



Problems?

We've all got them you know... Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite green-flavoured Pringles? Been playing *WOW* so long, your partner's left you? We can't help with those (no, not even the Mighty Wandy), but we can solve all of your hardware hassles. Wandy knows everything and is willing to help if you email him at **wandy@dearwandy.com**, including as much info as you can and system specs where applicable.

PRICEY EXTREME

Q I currently have a Pentium 4 660 CPU with 2GB RAM DDR2 667, ECS RS400-A motherboard, GIGABYTE 7800 GTX plus 550W PSU. I'd like to get more power without spending too much money.

I'm considering a new board and processor as I feel my machine is not quite meaty enough. I've looked on the web and really like the look of the ASUS Striker Extreme and QX6700, but I'm rather skint.

What confuses me is all the numbers. If I opted for the E6600, would this actually give me more power and speed? And why do game specifications still state a generic 3GHz CPU speed? My Pentium 4 660 is surely faster than a Pentium II 3.6GHz! It's just daft.

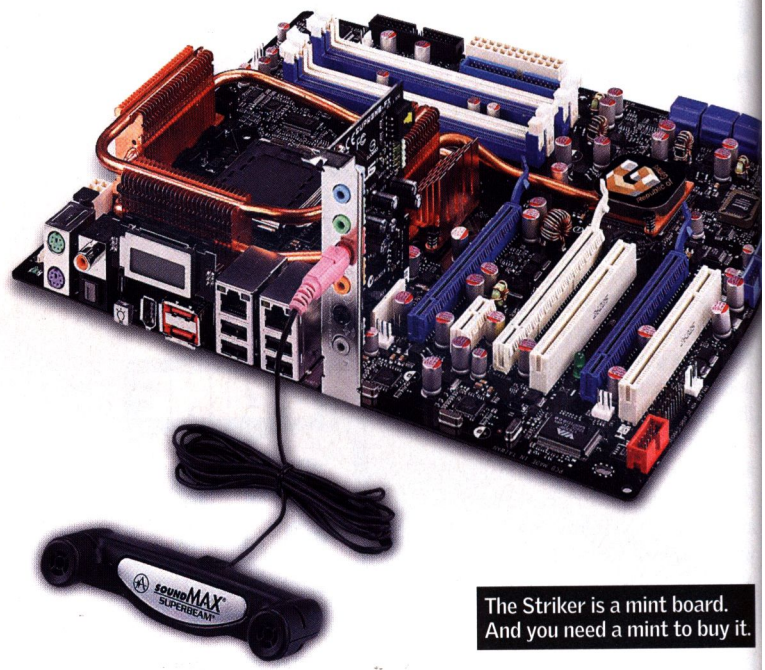
Clare

A *You're a little muddled with your product names. The Pentium 660 is a product from two years back whose seemingly awesome 3.6GHz performance trails the 'slower' 2.4GHz Core 2 Duo E6600 chip by some distance. Clock speed has never been a measure of a processor's true power, which is why both AMD and Intel switched to weird numbering schemes – and why everyone is confused by it all.*

There are a dozen or more Core 2 products on the market right now, many of which are hard to distinguish from one another unless you're someone who obsesses over benchmark scores. To cut a long rant short, the E6600 will do you admirably and will provide a noticeable boost. Get one.

Many games publishers still refer to the speed of old Pentiums in their requirements for two reasons. The first is because only a minority of people have a 'non-Pentium' in their PC – many gamers are gleefully unaware that their 2004 processor and video card are dreadfully old hat. And second, there are very few titles that are so demanding on the host system that they only work with brand-new hardware.

As to your quandary, you'll need to eBay that old RS400-A. While ECS list it as one of their current products, there's no support for Core 2 chippery. Luckily, it's a PCI-Express x16 board, so your 7800 GTX will slot quite happily into the ASUS Striker Extreme. However, as you've noticed, the Striker has a thoroughly ridiculous price tag, and I would advise you to direct your lust towards the XFX 650i Ultra (issue 183, 89%) instead. This is partly because you won't notice the difference, but mainly because it's more than £100 cheaper. The ASRock from our Buyer's Guide will save you even more, but its support for CrossFire will be wasted.



The Striker is a mint board. And you need a mint to buy it.

CORE 2 TICKLE

Q I just built a budget Core 2 system which runs perfectly, but I'd like to coax a little more speed through overclocking. This is something I've never tried before and I know little about. I have an ASRock 4Coredual-VSTA, E6320, 2GB PC2-5300 RAM and am running Vista.

The multiplier is fixed at 7 and the CPU is 266MHz. I tried changing overclocking mode to 'CPU, PCIE, Async. ' and then increasing in small increments, but the system wouldn't take any changes. Even a small increase to 271MHz resulted in instability. Typically, Vista loads but then the monitor turns off after a few seconds and the system seems to go to sleep.

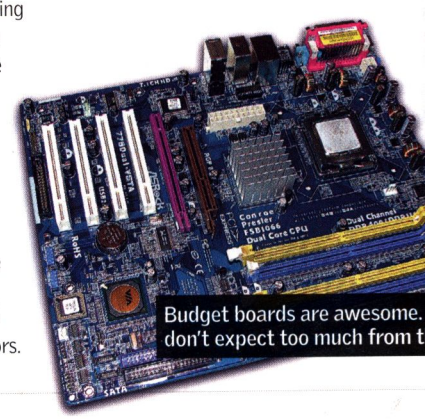
I've tried updating my BIOS to the latest version, but to no avail. I tried manually setting DRAM Frequency to 333MHz but this caused memory errors.

I'm a bit out of my depth, so any advice would be gratefully received. I'm just looking to get around the 2.1GHz mark.

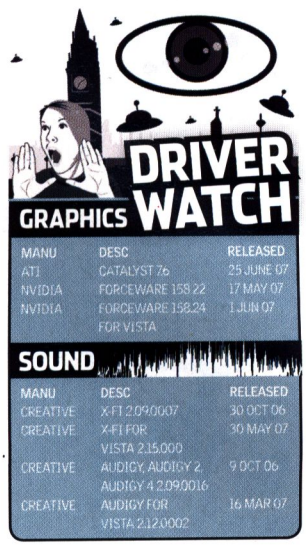
Andrew Stevenson

A *The problem with the 4Coredual-VSTA is that it's cheap – as you probably found, you can pick them up online for less than £39. ASRock kept the manufacturing costs down by using lesser quality components and tolerances, the effect being that while ordinary users never notice the difference, overclockers aren't able to get the gains they expect. Which is why the enthusiast market exists.*

As for your experience, what you've done sounds almost right. You do need to change the BIOS to use asynchronous mode – choosing 'CPU, PCIE, Sync.' may



Budget boards are awesome. don't expect too much from t



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✉ dearwandy, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw

"Water and electricity is a really stupid combination anyway, as any physics teacher will gladly tell you"

So don't mix them up, is Wandy's advice

actually see an underclock – and you need to leave the PCIE Frequency and indeed every other setting at its default value. In your shoes, I wouldn't go messing about with DRAM Frequency (although I would note that since your Core 2 likes the CPU/FSB and memory bandwidths to match, you may want to drop it accordingly as the 333MHz of PC2-5300 isn't ideal).

You then need to increase the CPU Frequency setting in 5MHz increments and stress-test thoroughly using one of the utilities available free from sp2004.fre3.com. I find it hard to believe you can't tickle your processor to at least 280MHz, but it's possible that your particular components simply won't handle any messing. And in which case, I'd leave it alone, or start a discussion on the Dear Wandy forums.

H2OH

Q I currently have a Dell XPS 210 with Windows Vista, Core 2 Duo E6300 processor, 2GB RAM, a 160GB hard drive and a crappy Radeon X1300.

I was thinking about upgrading to a water-cooled BFG 8800 GTS, but the more I read, the harder it seems to upgrade to. Could you please tell me if I have to make my entire system water-cooled, or can I just restrict it to the graphics card? And if I can just cool the graphics card alone, could you please direct me to a good water-cooling kit?

It'd also be good to see an article on water-cooling for beginners, as they're the best around and the smallest as my system is half height.

Ken Tsang

A *Stay clear of water-cooling. It almost made sense a few years ago, when the heat from Prescott chips was blistering the paint on adjacent walls and high-end video cards were struggling noisily to escape all the hot air they were producing, but your Core 2 has a thermal design rating of just 65W – significantly less than its Pentium predecessor. Even today's fastest Intel engine has half the cooling requirement of the old Extreme Editions.*

In addition, the XPS isn't even the least bit noisy, and nor for that matter is a plain 8800 GTS. The water-cooled route might still make sense if you were a champion overclocker, but the fact you've bought a Dell tells me you're not. Liquid might also be valid if you could swap the compact XPS 210 enclosure for something larger and better-suited, but you can't – not unless you want to invalidate your warranty and lose sight of every reason you bought retail.

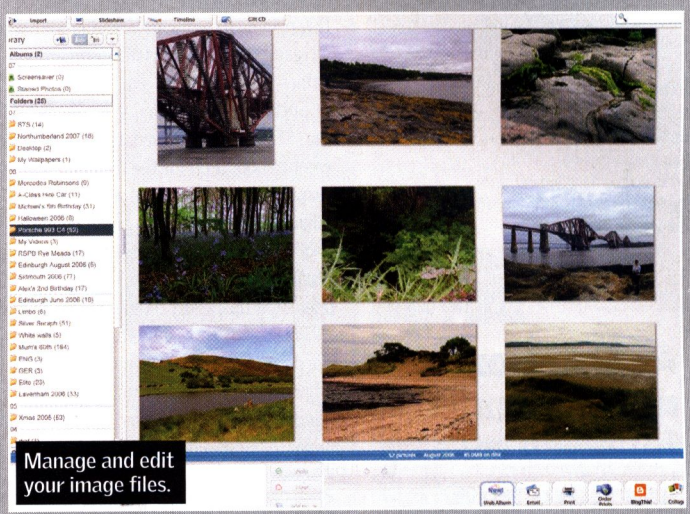
And after all that, even if you remained persuaded, the upheaval would be enormous and you'd still be stuck with noise. The pump is mechanical and unless you opt for passive radiators, you'll always need fans.

I should also remind everyone that water and electricity is a really stupid combination anyway, as any physics teacher will explain. Leave it to thrill- and attention-seekers. PCZ



Pumps are for ponds.

50 UTILITIES YOU HAVE TO USE BEFORE YOU DIE


Manage and edit your image files.

27 PICASA

COSTS FREE FROM **picasa.google.com**

If you own a digital camera, chances are you have a healthy number of photos spread around your hard disk, many of which need editing, renaming, sorting and printing out. While Vista is more geared towards such things, XP is a real drag when it comes to high-resolution images.

There are a number of utilities around to help you find and organise your pics, including XnView, ACDSee and IrfanView. The trouble with these is that they're somewhat restricted in what they do, or they're overburdened with features nobody needs.

Picasa is free and, like most Google tools, is manifestly better than anything else you'll have tried. It's slick, seriously fast and totally intuitive, and provides a slew of effects and image-related actions that you can see yourself actually using. In fact, it's fun just to breeze through all the old documents in your photo library, messing around with image filters and their settings to transform some of your shoddier snaps into something you might want to share.

And Picasa lets you do that too. There are quick buttons to help you post pics to a blog or web album, and the program will even upload photos directly to your favourite prints supplier. You can also work with layered Photoshop documents and even movies, and it's very easy to do all the stuff that in other programs requires messing about in configuration screens – create contact sheets, HTML export and so on. Try it now.

FORUMS: DIRECT FROM DEARWANDY.COM

(drterror666) I'm getting miffed with GetRight – I don't want to buy it and I'm pissed off with the website popping up when I'm trying to close down. I use Firefox. Any ideas? **(Heero Yuy) Fresh Download Manager from www.freshdevices.com is free with no ads, spyware or other crap and has decent integration into browsers. Register, download and enter the code. (Wandy) I started out using Go!Zilla, which turned into a spyware factory a few years back. Never got on with GetRight's ridiculous interface and have always used ReGet: www.reget.com. Don't forget to download the FlashGot addon for Firefox.**

@ watchdog@pczone.co.uk
watchdog, pc zone, future publishing, 2 balcombe st, london, nw1 6nw



WATCHDOG

Bad companies need sorting – and good companies need praising...

Here to help!

Companies pissing you off? Don't feel your voice is strong enough to shout down the suits? Or, has a company done something so great you want to nominate them for a 'Saints Not Sinners' mention? Email Suzy at **watchdog@pczone.co.uk** with the subject heading 'Watchdog', or write to her at the address above. Remember to include your name, address and contact number, and all purchasing details such as reference and invoice numbers.

A suspicious noise sounded, followed by a burning smell



Trees: phone-line attacking fiends.

pcspecialist.co.uk

THE ACCUSED: PC Specialist.
PROBLEM: Faulty machine and refund missing.

Buying a new machine's a big commitment, so reader Stuart Hodgson looked around before finally ordering a machine built by PCSpecialist.co.uk. After a bit of a delay the PC eventually arrived, but when Stuart went to boot it up for the first time, a suspicious crackling noise sounded, followed by a loud pop, a burning smell and a very dead PC. A week later, the repaired PC was returned. But upon opening it up, Stuart discovered loose PCI cards with no screws and a dent in the case. Upon running a game, the PC crashed, and this finally made up Stuart's mind to return the machine for a full refund under PC Specialist's 30-day policy. But 30 days and a couple of phone calls later, Stuart's ended up with the rather naff combination of no PC and no cash!

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: PC Specialist informed us that they were in receipt of Stuart's PC and also confirmed that: "Mr Hodgson's refund request has been actioned earlier this week, within the specified timeframe detailed in our terms."

They continued: "Like all, or certainly most PC companies, we put the highest priority on our after-sales care and quality control procedures. What we cannot legislate for is component failure and in this case the power supply was the initial cause of failure. The dent in the side of the case was almost certainly caused in transit, and even though we spend a great deal on the best quality packaging we can get, it doesn't stop damage in a very small number of deliveries.

"Mr Hodgson's refund request was based on his attempt to run a magazine disc and *Call Of Duty 2*. He did not return these, so we could not test them, but have tested many other disc formats and games on the PC with no failures. There was indeed a PCI card without a screw, which was a failure in our quality control, which will be investigated.

"I can, however, understand Mr Hodgson's frustration and we sincerely apologise to Mr Hodgson for any deficiency in our levels of service."

FINAL VERDICT: Full refund given.

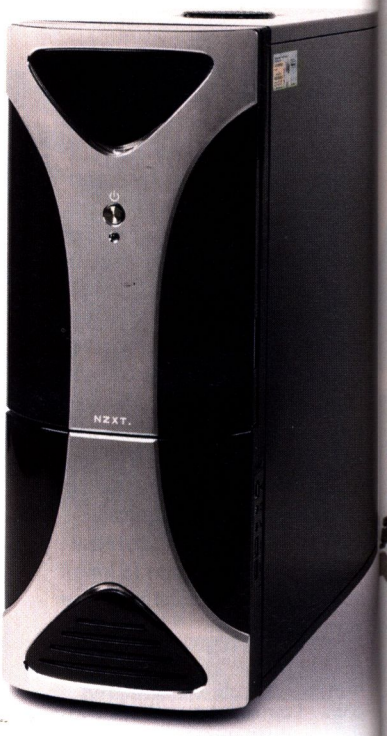
BT

THE ACCUSED: BT.
PROBLEM: Dodgy broadband.

Despite our divine appearances and the hallowed words that spill onto the pages of the mag every month, the *PC ZONE* staff are prone to the same problems as everyone else. Case in point: when I (Suzy) moved into a new house in August 2006, I moved my BT broadband account over with me. But I soon noticed that the connection kept dropping out. Sometimes it would work for weeks without a problem, other times it couldn't last 30 seconds.

PC ZONE INVESTIGATION: Soon after the problems began, I got in contact with BT. I was referred to a high-level complaints team who refunded me several months of broadband charges thanks to the practically unusable service. But getting the problem resolved was a different matter. One engineer was sent out to check the line but found no problem. Another called me at work to say he was standing outside my house (I had no idea he was coming); and the next arrived the morning after I explained that I wasn't around. At least he checked the broadband connections, but finally he left, stumped, unable to find any cause for our problems – and of course, none of our problems ever materialised during an engineer's visit.

Seven months and four engineers later, I'd given up hope of finding a solution and closed the complaint with BT. The problems continued intermittently until one windy night a few months later, when not only the broadband was down but the phone line too. Thankfully, the problem was still there when the engineer arrived the next day and after a bit of searching, the culprit was found. A tree in the street had overgrown, stretching our phone line and causing the connection to be lost.



A new PC should not smell of burning, reckons reader Stuart Hodgson.

A new phone line was subsequently fitted, and amazingly enough the problem was resolved. A mere nine months after it had first appeared!

FINAL VERDICT: The line now works but the broadband speed is so slow that I'm transferring to another provider as soon as my BT contract runs out... PCZ

SAINTS NOT SINNERS

XFX play hard

Reader Michael Bates wanted to let us know about the great service he'd had from XFX. Recently his XFX graphics card died on him, but when he contacted the place of purchase, they informed him that as the card was more than two years old, his warranty had run out. In a last desperate bid, Michael contacted XFX directly, informing them that since he had given up work to bring up his twins, he didn't have money for a new card. Assuming he was destined to a life of *Solitaire*, he was caught by surprise when XFX sent him a review copy of a card. Michael's "really amazed by their fantastic gesture". Warms your heart, doesn't it?

REMEMBER: SPEAKERS ARE NO GOOD IF YOU'VE GOT NO EARS

Oh sure, shelling out bucks on those new speakers seems like a good idea. But how foolish will you feel when the debt collectors cut off your ears after you miss another mortgage payment?

HARDWARE DIVIDE

Here at *PC ZONE* we love many things: beer, kebabs, cake, nipples... Oh, and shiny new kit!

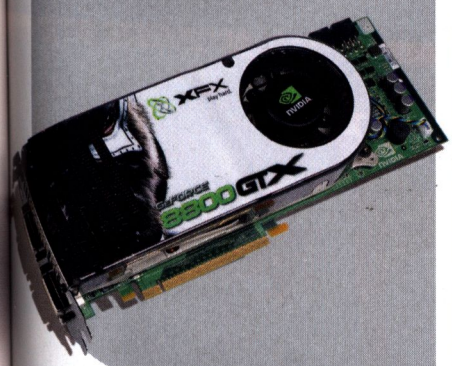
LOADED?

GRAPHICS

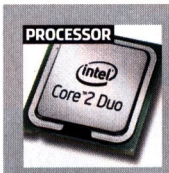
8800 GTX

EXPECT TO PAY £370
MANUFACTURER XFX
WEBSITE xfxforce.co.uk

AMD have arrived! And the Radeon they brought along is nice enough, but it's neither faster or slower than the 8800 GTS, so our favourite GTX keeps hogging the top spot. Yes, we could have put the Ultra here, but it's over £500 and not much faster. Even we're not that stupid.



PROCESSOR



CORE 2 EXTREME X6800

PAY £600
MAN Intel
WEB intel.com

Faster than its predecessor and faster even than any Athlon FX, Intel's new 2.93GHz Extreme processor has 1066MHz FSB, 4MB cache and LGA775 packaging. With a shorter pipeline, unique Smart Memory Access and Advanced Smart Cache technologies, its performance has people wondering what AMD can do to catch up.

MOTHERBOARD

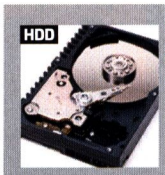


D975XBX2

EXPECT TO PAY £155
MANUFACTURER Intel
WEB intel.com

Everything that was good about our long-term favourite D975XBX, only with a thick coating of overclocking goodness. Intel's flagship desktop product represents all that's good about the company's products: solid, reliable, no-nonsense and fast. Saddle up with a Core 2 Duo and away you go!

HDD

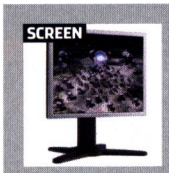


RAPTOR 150GB

EXPECT TO PAY £149
MANUFACTURER Western Digital
WEBSITE www.wdc.com

Travelling at 10,000rpm and with a 4.5ms seek time, the Raptor is billed as the world's fastest SATA drive. It's also now double the size, meaning you now need just one of them in your rig. But two in RAID-0 configuration will give you oodles of space and make *Battlefield 2* really fly.

SCREEN



VP930

EXPECT TO PAY £250
MANUFACTURER ViewSonic
WEBSITE viewsonic.co.uk

With our favourite LCD1970GX stuck at around £350, the VP930 makes more sense. It's a superb all-rounder at a fantastic price, and thanks to ViewSonic's elegant styling it looks just as commanding on your desk as the ousted NEC. It also pivots, tilts and offers 270-degrees of swivel.

SOUNDCARD

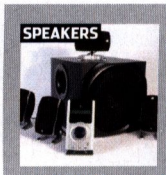


SOUND BLASTER X-FI FATALITY FPS

EXPECT TO PAY £140
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

Slightly bonkers soundcard for audiophiles with deep pockets. Supports EAX 5.0, with 64MB X-RAM for top-quality sound effects. CMSS-3D works magic on a stereo signal and makes headphone gaming crystal. Sounds nicer than an Audigy, but still ultra pricey.

SPEAKERS



Z-5500

EXPECT TO PAY £195
MANUFACTURER Logitech
WEBSITE www.logitech.co.uk

The price has just dropped below £200 and these speakers are simply the best we've ever tested. They make both games and movies ravish your ears, and you'll soon find yourself blowing the dust from your old CDs and DVDs just so you can sit in the middle of the sound and revel in it.

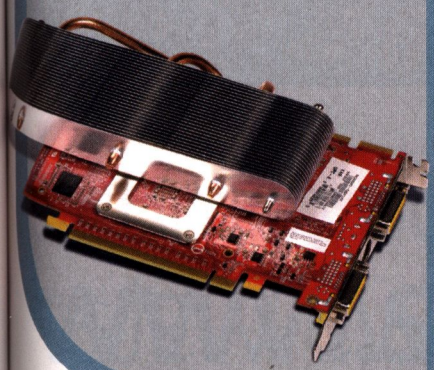
SKINT?

GRAPHICS

2600 XT

EXPECT TO PAY £99
MANUFACTURER MSI
WEBSITE msicomputer.co.uk

MSI's Radeon 2600 XT is a mainstream card that provides X1950 Pro-rivalling levels of power and DirectX 10 together with HDCP and HDMI output – all wrapped up in a genuinely silent waistcoat and with a double-digit price tag. Ideally suited to home-theatre fans and gamers alike.



PROCESSOR

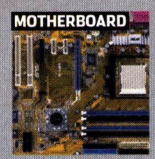


CORE 2 DUO E6300

EXPECT TO PAY £105
MANUFACTURER Intel
WEBSITE intel.com

The 1.86GHz Conroe E6300 might be a stripped-down version of its peers, but don't sneer: it clocks up like nothing else. A smaller die and lower temperatures mean that, with the right board and the right settings, it delivers amazing performance for the money. A great entry-level buy.

MOTHERBOARD

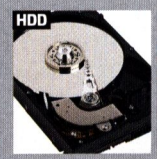


CONROEXFIRE-ESATA2

EXPECT TO PAY £52
MANUFACTURER ASRock
WEB asrock.com

Paired with an E6300, this ASRock board can help you wring high-end performance from your budget-priced rig. It features a 1066/800/533 MHz FSB, SATA II with RAID, Vista-friendly 7.1 HD audio onboard, Gigabit LAN and ASRock's easy overclocking features. It even has CrossFire support. An awful lot of features for not a lot of money.

HDD

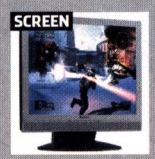


CAVIAR 1600AAJS SATA-II

EXPECT TO PAY £30
MAN Western Digital
WEBSITE www.wdc.com

It's not like a 160GB hard drive is unfeasibly huge any more, but it remains more than enough for the casual gamer to do a spot of casual gaming. A few good titles, Steam, a couple of thousand music files and the odd porn flick still leaves plenty of room for Windows to manoeuvre.

SCREEN



VA903M

EXPECT TO PAY £118
MANUFACTURER ViewSonic
WEBSITE www.viewsonic.co.uk

The VA903m ousts our favourite VE710s as it's cheaper and has a 19-inch screen. Plus, it's a better bet than any of the similarly-priced widescreen variants as there are more pixels on the screen: its 1280x1024 panel offers greater depth than the 1440x900 panel of its sibling VA1912w.

SOUNDCARD

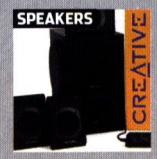


SOUND BLASTER AUDIGY 2 VALUE

EXPECT TO PAY £32
MANUFACTURER Creative Labs
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

If you're a casual gamer, there's little point throwing half a mortgage payment at your soundcard because you'll not be able to tell the difference. The cheap Audigy features EAX 4.0 and Dolby Digital EX support, and makes an awful lot of sense.

SPEAKERS



INSPIRE P5800

EXPECT TO PAY £37
MANUFACTURER Creative
WEBSITE uk.europe.creative.com

You can go cheaper, but to meet the quality of the P5800 you'll need spend a lot more, as there's no better set in this price range. The subwoofer is deep and creamy, the satellites crisp and clean. A wired remote, line-in and headphone jack complete a very decent little package.

PIC & WIN SNAP UP A PRIZE

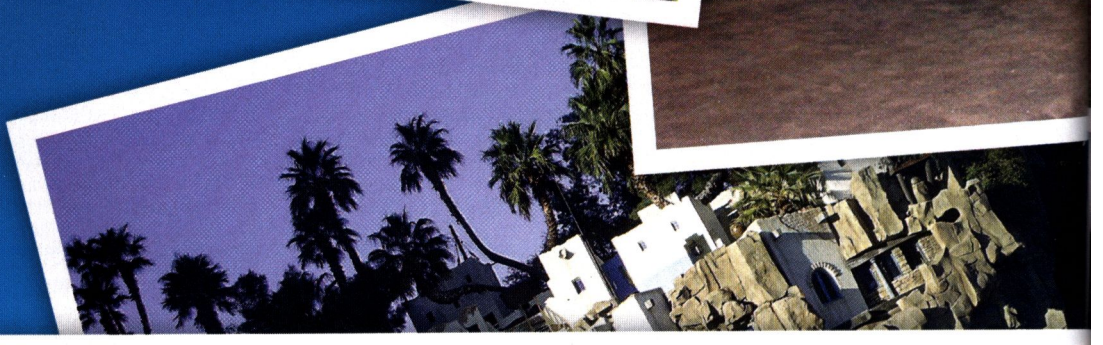
Share your summer snaps

... and win great prizes!

Summer's here so it's time to get your camera out and get snapping. Take any opportunity – the kids in the garden, a fancy dress party, a ride on your bike, a holiday exploration – wherever you're up to, whatever the shot, you could be in with a chance of winning a great prize...







You don't need to be an expert to enter, you just need to capture a great moment, whether it's a work of brilliance taken on an expensive camera, or a quick snap from a mobile phone.

To enter, simply choose a photo of yours that you like, head over to **www.summersnaps.com** to upload the shot and then keep an eye on your email to see if you're a winner.

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PCZONE FREEPLAY

PCZONE ON THE DVD

We were poor, but we were *happy*

Golden moments

LAST NIGHT, I was in the pub. It was one of those Samuel Smith's pubs which refuse to carry regular brands in favour of made-up stuff like Scintilla Cola and Scrubbly Nutbags Ginger Ale. I go there primarily because it's cheap, and most of the people I choose to hang around with are poor, or tight. It's part of the economical lifestyle that makes me feel at home in the Freeplay section.

However, when I went to the toilet, I learned a very important lesson. With a tipsy flip of my guiding hand, I accidentally sent a short burst of urine onto the businessman's shoe at the next urinal. I started to apologise, but seeing as he hadn't reacted, I choked off the first syllable – which came out as a simple-minded whine – and decided to concentrate on finishing my toilet.

When he'd gone, I tried to figure out, by pacing backwards and forwards and looking down, whether or not he would have been able to see my accident land on his foot. Then I realised that – to the person on my other side, I must have looked like I was having a sullen, shuffling dance with my urinal.

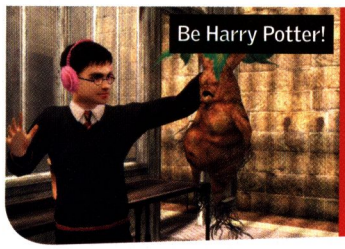
You can imagine how much fun I had, and this is the lesson I learned – while I may have saved a paltry sum of money by going to a cheap pub, the best fun I had all night was urinating on another man's shoe, making an odd howl and dancing with a piss receptacle. And these things, my friends, are free.

Welcome to Freeplay.

Jon Blyth

Jon Blyth, staff writer

WHAT'S FREE THIS MONTH



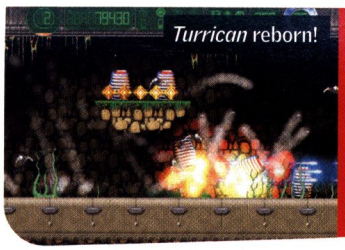
106 Demo pages
It's literally like dipping your elbow into a game. Literally





108 News
Hand-picked news satsumas make the juiciest punch



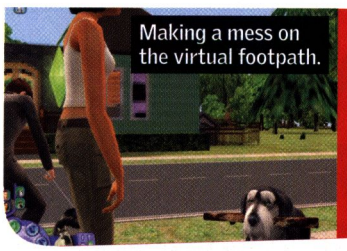


112 Freeware
Hogarty's flushed with free games. Diagnosis: fun!



114 Play!
We bring you the mods and the rockers



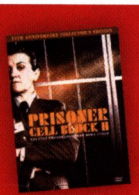


116 Jackass
Further *Sims* meddling, with Barry Test and pets



118 Online Zone
Fight Club! *ZONE* chat! Blog bits! And Postcards From The Edge...

PCZONE FREE-O-METER



0 HOURS

325.3 HOURS*

*Approximate amount of completely free stuff this month



Demos

***Jon Blyth* rounds up our free DVD**



PCZONE ON THE DVD

Having problems getting something on our DVD to work? Phone our helpline on **01225 442244** and ask for cover-disc support. Alternatively, email **support@futurenet.co.uk**, including as much information as possible about your system and the nature of your problem.

GHOST RECON: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER 2

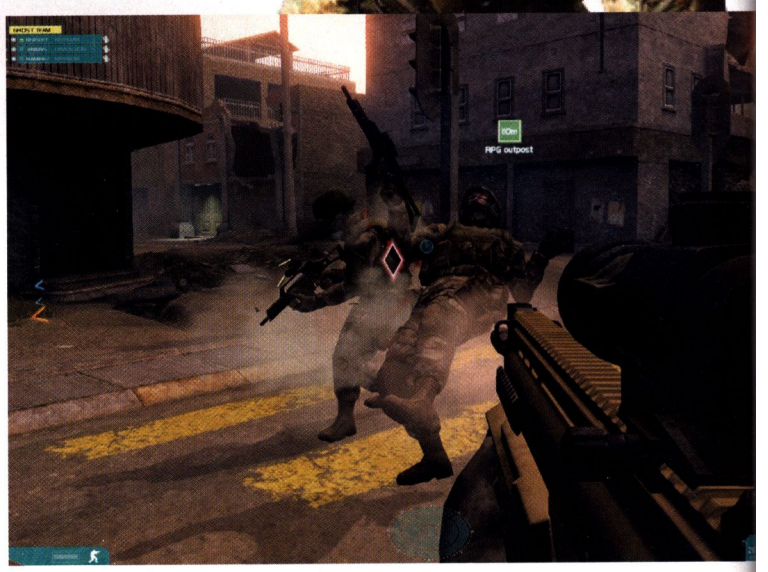
Hey, buddy. Wanna cam?

ghostrecon.uk.ubi.com

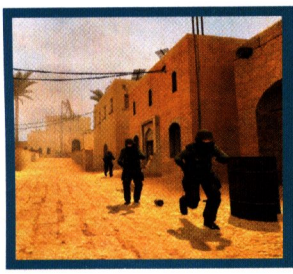
I'M GOING TO try and talk you through this demo, but you're going to have to bear with me. I've just heard that our cat's gone missing. So... Here's the first level of the single-player mission of *GRAW2*. Climb back into Scott Mitchell's sandy flip-flops and use the tech of the near-future to communicate with your squad of four.

Speaking of which, I hope our cat comes back in the near future. But not the 2014 near future, when *GRAW* is set. By then, I'd be able to use the satellite technology that allows for tactical squad deployment to trace our poor kitten, like in *Enemy Of The State*.

Most of the improvements to *GRAW2* were made in the multiplayer, but if you liked the first *GRAW*, you'll be aching to get out of Mexico City... Oh shit. What if he's in the Domino man's mudflap?



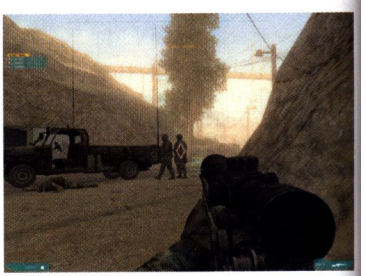




WAR IS DUSTY
Have you noticed that war never happens in areas that are spick and span? So does dust cause the war, or vice versa? We set up an experiment with red and black ants on a dusty mantelpiece. Sure enough: WAR.



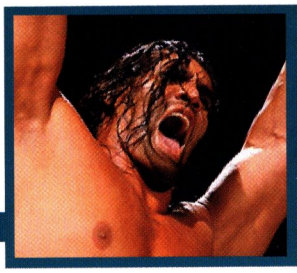
WAR IS LETHAL
Some will tell you that war is about political objectives, more than body counts. Their problem is they've never been on a headshot rampage; they're just saying that because they're rubbish at killing people.



GRAW Faw things about waw



WAR IS A DUCHESS
If war was a duchess, which it's not, it would be a monstrous lady, killing thousands of men on both sides and driving tanks into hospitals. For that, and many other reasons, war is rarely personified as a duchess.



WAR IS RAW
One of the most honest and brutal forms of war is when Chavo Guerrero sings '*Chavito Ardiente*' to The Great Khali. War has certainly come on since The Undertaker locked the Ultimate Warrior in his coffin.



HARRY POTTER AND THE ORDER OF THE PHOENIX

Kids and grown-ups love it so...

www.ea.com/harrypotterandtheorderofthephoenix

SEVEN FILMS, WITH an inevitable seven games, crossing every format. You'd be quite forgiven for assuming *Order Of The Phoenix* would be a tired colcannon made from stupidity and shit.

You'd be as wrong as a button! It may be a bit simple at times, and there's a lot of walking around, but there's also tons to do. So stop acting like you're all above it and for christ's sake stop saying: "Oh, I hate people reading children's books, I'm so growed up can I do a poo please."

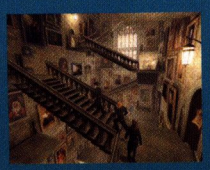


You little charmer

Fancy a quick hex behind the Room of Requirement?



AC-AC-ACCIO
Accio is the wizard's equivalent of saying "c'mere, you". Illogically enough, it can also be used to pull glowing bricks out of the wall to give you discovery points. Trade these in for videos of child actors running around and screaming!



EXPLODIODO
Dotted around Hogwarts is loads of stuff that looks like it should be on fire, but isn't. By casting the Explodiodo spell (OK, it's called Incendio), you can set them aflame. More discovery points! More screaming kids!

DUNGEON RUNNERS

It's almost free!

www.dungeonrunners.com

IF NORMAL DEMOS are sliced vertically, giving you a narrow wedge of the action cake, then *Dungeon Runners* is sliced horizontally. You've got the whole game, but you'll never taste the delicious icing. Tempting yellow loot will forever have a forbidding red background, unless you pays your monthly subscription. This'll also let you stack your potions, freeing up your inventory for more Socks of the Greasy Owl Plus Number.

Dungeon Runners is a lot of fun to play – it tips the hat so regularly to *Diablo 2* and *World Of Warcraft* that the hat falls off, and lands in a large and rather soggy puddle of homage. However, if you can resist the allure of decent loot, it'll be free forever.



1. This portal will take you into a randomly generated dungeon, where you will meet Wargs, and all that shit.
2. Yellow exclamation marks: the universal language for "pop over there and kill 20 of something please".
3. Note the hilarious banter between GoofyGuy and the infuriated rest of the world. He's so damn Goofy!!!

Outdoor dungeons?

The lap of luxury...



TOWN
Town areas: missions, spell upgrades and people standing around in groups. Groups you aren't a part of. Cliquey bastards.



DUNGEON
Dungeons – relentless gangs of monsters, loot flying out of corpses and the occasional chest. Now *that's* Dungeon Running.

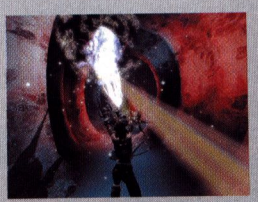
E3 MOVIE BLOWOUT... ON TOAST



SPEEDBALL 2
www.speedball2.com
Finally... Gameplay footage from the game that could put a funnel into our skull and piss on our memories, or justify 20 years of going "they don't make games like they used to", before thinking about it, and adding, "until now".



BIOSHOCK DEVELOPER'S DIARY
www.bioshock.com
"Hi, I'm Larry Bancroft, and I just put a monster in a ballroom." That's just what they won't be saying on the last round of *BioShock* prick-teasers. Just think... We'll all be actually playing it soon.



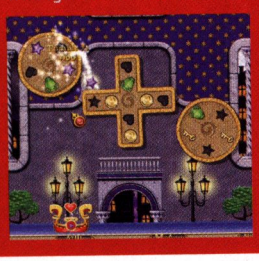
HELLGATE: LONDON
www.hellgatelondon.com
Will it work? Will it feel right? Will it expand the dungeon trawl into a new perspective, or will it leave you feeling sausage-fingered and narked? We can only hope, but we can't wait to find out.



TABULA RASA
www.playtr.com
Mixing in the charms of your average MMOG with a few of the tenets of the FPS, *Tabula Rasa* could well shake the tree of online gaming fairly hard. Quite how many apples and twigs will fall out is still unknown.

PCZONE HOT DOWNLOADS

VENICE
www.gamershell.com/download_19825.shtml



Was *Peggle* a fluke? Has PopCap's alignment with the constellations of brutal addiction and ridiculous charm passed for another seven years? *Venice* is more highly polished casual action, but will it hold your attention for more than 30 seconds?

HOT NEW GAME INTERVIEW
www.computerandvideogames.com/article.php?id=168492

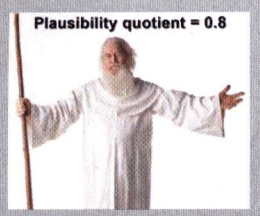


In the world of PC gaming, you hear a lot of bluster and nonsense. We cut to the heart of the matter in this webscluisive interview, which features inconsistent accents, shaky improvisation and Will Porter's adorable voice.

SNIPPETS



KNIGHTS OF THE FORCE
www.kotf.com
Master Tim is nearing completion of his 2GB total mod for the *Jedi Academy* series. No-one can say he's not ambitious – a videogame remake of all six *Star Wars* films, with no George Lucas involved! We didn't get a chance to play it before going to press, but we're hoping to feature it more fully next month.



BATTLEGROUND GOD
www.philosophersnet.com/games/god.htm
Think hot philosophical debate is beyond the realms of gaming? Well, if the *Left Behind* game was anything to go by, you're right. But this list of multiple choice questions will rank your thoughts on god, and rate your internal logic. Contradict yourself and a drawing of a man gets crippled.

MMORPGTV

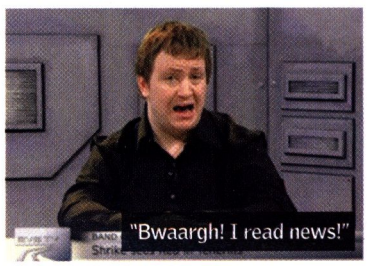
For when you're not actually playing *EVE Online* eve-online.tv

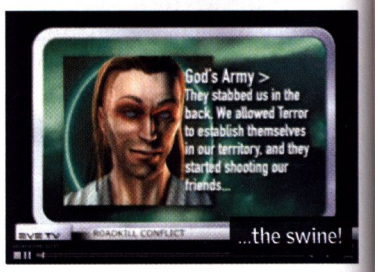
***EVE ONLINE* HAS** a fairly solid reputation as a vast psychic sponge, that lines your skull and prevents you from taking basic life decisions. Here at *ZONE* we hate making basic life decisions, so we were thrilled to hear that *EVE* now has its own web-based TV station.

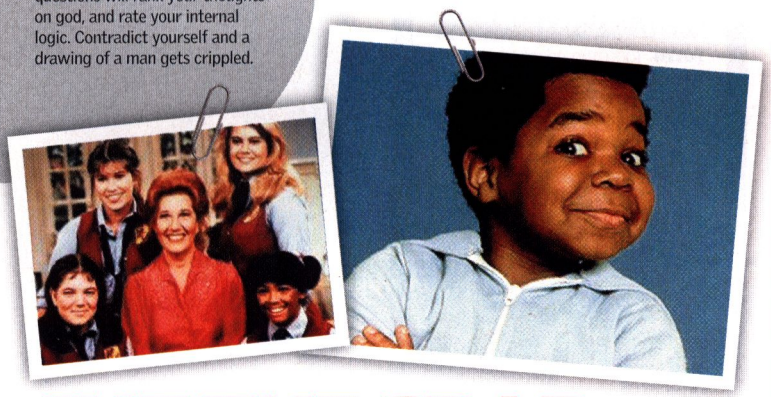
Eve-online.tv goes out once a week, features a faintly gothic presenter and will contain information that you'd be well-advised not to use outside the online *EVE* community. Try telling a loved one you've just been watching spiraljunkie laying down the crack on what God's Army are up to, and you'll deserve every slap you get. After a free trial, they'll ask you to pay about 70p an episode. We're in the YouTube stage of human evolution now, though – so will people pay? Well, if they're really into *EVE Online*, the answer's probably yes.

So now, those precious moments you spend out of the game can be spent watching other people talking about *EVE's* governance, cheating, player interviews, PvP Tournaments. This could be the chair under the door handle you need to stop the real world bleeding back into your brain.









CUT THE CRAP

Sony saves time with Minisode Network

www.myspace.com/minisodenetwork

NOSTALGIA'S A REAL pain when you're young. People going on about *Bod* and *Trumpton* – or even *Air Wolf* and *The A-Team* – never seem to care that the world is getting fuller of people who're too young to remember the shows.

The Minisode Network solves all that. Essentially nostalgia for the attention-deficit generation, it's an online video streaming service that distils half-hour episodes of your 'favourite' old TV shows into five-minute bursts, delivering the plot, the characters and the jokes in a way that makes you think you've seen the whole thing. It's a bluffer's guide to the '80s, and although it's pretty Americanised, it's only a matter of time before they do racist classic *Love Thy Neighbour*.

PUTTING THE BRAKES ON

Auto Assault exhausted

***WOW* BLEW OPEN** a world of possibilities to subscription-hungry MMO developers. Sadly, NCsoft failed to capture imaginations with their *Mad Max*-ish post-apocalyptic wastelands. Fast-paced, blast-happy and yet desolate and grey, *Auto Assault* never gained the paying members to make the gameworld feel anything other than, well, post-apocalyptic – and now it's being crushed into an unprofitable cube.

With NCsoft's recent launch of the more casual-feeling and free-to-play *Dungeon Runners*, does this mark a move towards a less subscription-based business model for the MMO industry? Watching *Archlord* drop from an ambitious (and fairly insulting) three-tier system to today's subscription-free approach, it feels like a monthly charge isn't a commitment people will toss around so easily.

While Blizzard are hardly going to be giving up their monthly income of 70-bazillion quid, it'll be interesting to see how the less godlike MMO companies price themselves to survive in the future.



SCIENCE SAYS WE WIN

And the government should buy us all games

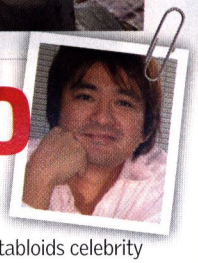
WHEN YOU READ about videogames in newspapers, it's usually some predictable headline excuse blaming stabbing crime X on stabbing game Y – despite the fact that stabbing game Y had guns and helicopters and everything, and was brilliant.

What we're not used to is respectable scientists – the kind of people who've heard of peer review – coming out and saying that games are great, educational and good for kids. So good in fact, that they should be researched and developed by federal government. In a timely post-*Manhunt 2* report, the Federation of American Scientists have said just that. Gaming can help prepare students for an increasingly competitive global market, which appears to be a fatherly, scientific way of saying 'stabbing people is cool'. Watch out for government-funded up-to-the-minute classics, like *Hungry Horace Learns The Merits Of Postponed Pleasure*.



Science: catching up with us at last.

MIZUGUCHI'S TINY TOKYO



Second Life hosts Japanese culture museum, ski ramp

AH, *SECOND LIFE*. An interesting concept-cum-overblown marketing exercise that has gone so mainstream as to attract features in gaming bibles such as *Heat* and the *Daily Mail*.

Weirdly though, the *Mail* seems to be saving the stories of furry-sex, cyber-whores, virtual casinos and people dancing on the Virginia Tech memorial for a slower news day.



Mizuguchi's vision of a Second Tokyo.

Yup, the flirting-with-tabloids celebrity backlash has yet to come to Linden Labs, and in the meantime, console-gaming legend Tetsuya Mizuguchi has agreed to build Tokyo inside their vast, low-resolution world. The creator of games such as *Space Channel 5*, *Rez* and *Lumines* has been recruited to create 'a museum of Japanese pop culture'.

So, will people just be walking around and looking at crazy designs on cans of Japanese fizzy pop? Not at all! They'll be skiing down a massive slope that goes right through the middle of the place. After all, what's cultural preservation without the addition of a gigantic virtual ski slope?

We'll certainly be logging in to see what's Mizuguchi's up to, but like our other forays into *Second Life*, we'll be logging out once our skin starts to crawl off the bones.

SNIPPETS



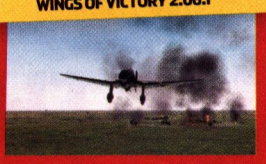
GIVE THEM THEIR DUE...
snipr.com/goldfarmz
Gold farmers may suck the soul out of MMO gaming, but they're tenacious bastards. Blizzard's latest patch blocked spam chats, so the buggers hacked the game to make hundreds of gnome corpses drop from the sky and spell out their web address. Props. Reluctant props, but props nonetheless.



MORE FREE THAN FREE
snipr.com/opensourceawards
Open-source programming has given us free alternatives to just about everything on our hard drives. These awards honour games that may have a 'not retro, just dated' feel to them, but there's still one or two gaming horses that are worth digging your spurs into.

Bug-Fix of the Month

THIS MONTH
BATTLE OF BRITAIN II: WINGS OF VICTORY 2.06.1



Rest easy, ladies! This patch stops a CTD in MathLib::HighIntercept()+116 byte(s). And more!

Movie of the month

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3

It's an E3 video orgy on our cover disc this month, so we decided to choose the hardest one from which to get decent grabs. This video is a choppy rush of action, all white flashes and violent titillation – very exciting, but an absolute twat to get decent shots from. Oh well, you'll just have to watch it!



5 6 7 8

I mean, what's that? Is it a close-up of a gigantic ankle or something?



Ah, that's better – some Dark Walker action. This is the business. Watch those lasers...



Hello, the good ol' BioRifle's been given a makeover. Looks like hot, toxic sex that's green.



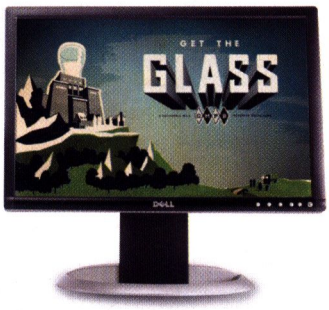
Here's some vague aerial action. Oh, just watch the video – it's guaranteed to froth your latté.

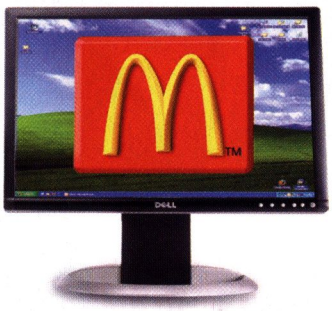
COMMERCIAL BREAKDOWN

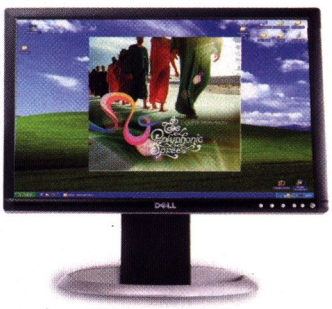
Jon Blyth on the games that sell stuff...

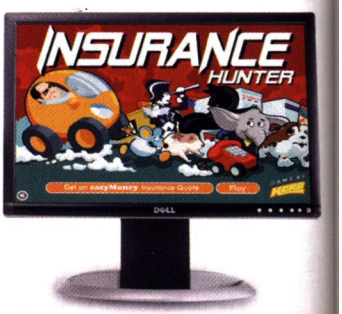


THERE'S A WORLD of gaming ingenuity and creativity out there, and nowhere is it less in evidence than the profit-motivated boardrooms of our planet's beloved corporations. However well-intentioned and/or clueless the individuals involved, to these soulless monoliths, games are simply branding exercises or viral marketing. That's all very well – but are they ever any good? Let's have a look...











GET THE GLASS

www.gettheglass.com

WHAT ARE THEY SELLING?

Californian milk.

WHAT'S THE GAME?

You're the Adachi family, and you love your milk. It's fair to say that as a family, you're bat-shit crazy over the milk. So you decide to drive to a big glass on top of a hill, before the police send you to Milkatraz, where contrary to the name, there isn't any milk. It's a dice-rolling boardgame, with interactive challenges that tell you how milk is good for your sister's hair and your mum's PMS. True!

IS IT ANY GOOD?

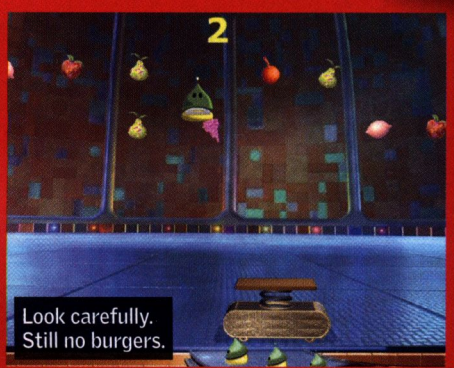
Actually, yes. The milk-plugging is bearable, the games are distracting and the whole thing is almost needlessly well-produced. We played to the end, which is fair enough.

WHY NOT TRY...

Some *Toast of War* to go with that milk: www.addictinggames.com/toastofwar.html

MCDONALD'S PLAY ZONE

www.mcdonalds.co.uk/?f=y



WHAT ARE THEY SELLING?

The novel idea that McDonald's isn't really about selling burgers, but also about being lovely.

WHAT'S THE GAME?

You'll slide out of your chair in sarcastic surprise to hear there's a fruit-eating game. However, they've also thrown in a pointless and logo-infested *Breakout* clone, and Winnie the Pooh catching plates in a carrier bag. If this sounds confused, well – you try advertising a burger company without suggesting that anyone should eat a burger.

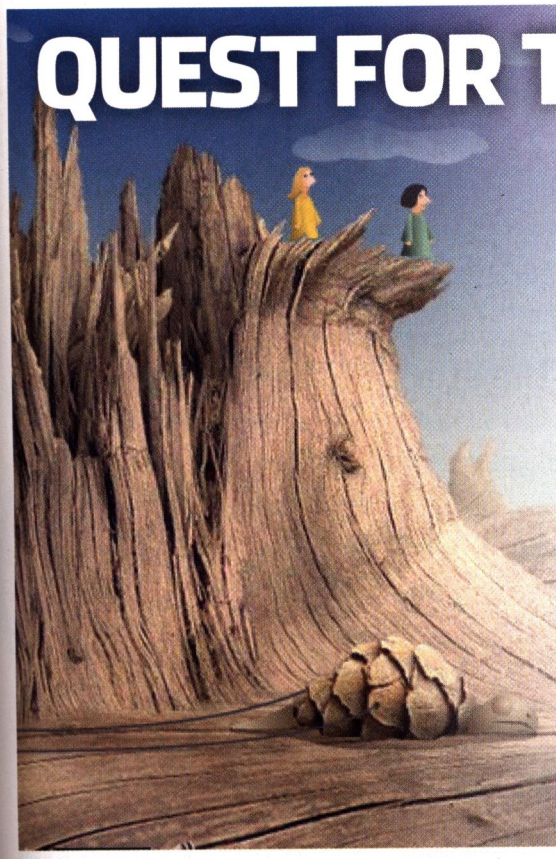
IS IT ANY GOOD?

It's absolute shit. Insulting, unfinished half-games most likely based on the fact that someone said "durrr, duh kids zone shud hab gamez in it" in a meeting somewhere.

WHY NOT TRY...

Snack Dash – it actually has a coherent message, and there's as solid a *Sonic The Hedgehog* clone as you'll find in a Flash game. Head to: www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/game.asp

QUEST FOR THE REST





questfortherest.com/

WHAT ARE THEY SELLING?
The Polyphonic Spree's 2004 Album, *Together We're Heavy*.

WHAT'S THE GAME?
If it looks familiar, there's a reason. It's by Amanita Design, the creators of *Samorost*, and granddaddies of the Flash relax-explore adventure. It's the usual routine of seeing what you can click, then seeing how it all interacts.

IS IT ANY GOOD?
It's OK; you're left to play the game through without brand interruption, and it'll sponge up a pretty hour of your life. As a bonus, the feel-good ethereal warblings of the Polyphonics feel appropriate to the *Samorost* stylings. It feels filthy to type this kind of marketing bullshit, but it's almost like brand symbiosis.

ALSO TRY...
The original *Samorost* is at amanita-design.net, but you could also go to the old classic, vectorpark.com – there's no real point to it, but it's ever so pretty.

WE'RE NOT DOOMED!

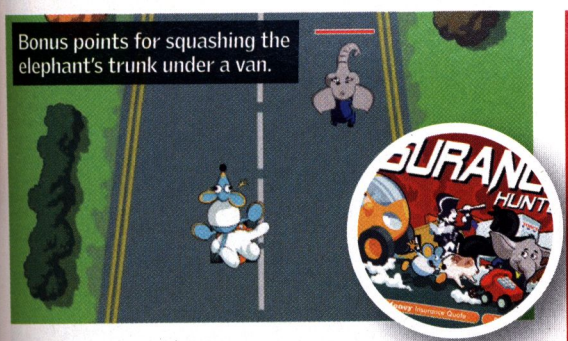
After that filthy trawl through the cynical world of brand identity, here's a couple of pure, beautiful lovelies to remind you that the world isn't a revolting place...



EXPERIMENTAL GAMEPLAY PROJECT
www.experimentalgameplay.com
If you've never been here, then go now. There's an archive of simple and innovative games, made by people who give a shit. Some Flash games, some downloadable, but all are worth a look.



KLOONIGAMES
www.kloonigames.com
He's making a game a month, and a lot of them are the gameplay opposite of what we've got here; they're more fun than they should be, and have that seed of superbonus addiction.



INSURANCE HUNTER

www.2dplay.com/insurance-hunter/insurance-hunter-play.htm

WHAT ARE THEY SELLING?
Car insurance.

WHAT'S THE GAME?
It takes inspiration from *SpyHunter*, but seeing as it's for an insurance company, you're penalised for driving into other cars. However, you do get to set fire to a mouse.

IS IT ANY GOOD?
Who cares? The fact this exists means that somewhere out there's a no-win-no-fee personal injury claims game, where you play a greedy bastard who wants five grand for falling over.

WHY NOT TRY...
Two-player super-sprint with *Rural Racer*.
www.miniclip.com/games/rural-racer/en/

SIMPSONS WRECKING BALL

www.simpsonsmovie.com

WHAT ARE THEY SELLING?
The Simpsons Movie.



WHAT'S THE GAME?
Homer drives a wrecking ball into the police van that holds his family. The further you knock the van, the better. And, er, that's about it.

IS IT ANY GOOD?
No, it's awful. The graphics are lovely – thanks, money – but the game is a one-trick pony with no legs. The impulse to play the next level is only there because you're convinced something will happen, and it doesn't.

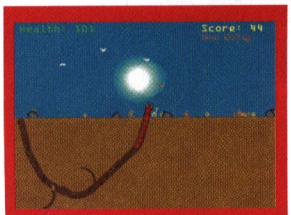
WHY NOT TRY...
On the same site, make your own *Simpsons* avatar – only six years behind *South Park*. Otherwise, these games infest the Flash world; you might as well play *Yeti Olympics*: gprime.net/game/ylympics/

Freeware

PCZONE ON THE DVD

Steve Hogarty was born free, as free as the wind blows

Freeware brings you the best free games content the net has to offer. This month, freeware games remake *Turrican*, replicate great movies, reminisce about NES games, really fly through space and, erm, readily puzzle. Yes, there's a puzzle one...



DEATH WORM

Creepy-crawly

Dev: JTR | snipr.com/deathworm

***TREMORS* WAS AN** amazing movie, based on the age-old game of not touching the floor because the floor is made of hot lava. Instead of leaping from sofa to sofa though, the guys in *Tremors* were jumping about on rocks to save themselves from giant underground worms who could hear their footsteps.

Death Worm is a game in which you play one of those underground worms. You terrorise people and animals by leaping out at them and flying through the air, before plunging back into the safety of the Earth like some soily dolphin. It feels great to control, and as you become more notorious and your reputation spreads, tanks and planes come along to either ruin your fun or be hilariously destroyed. Play it now, or just tape pincers to your face instead.

HURRICAN

Here's the story of the *Hurrican*

Dev: Poke53280 | www.hurrican-game.de

FREEWARE GAME OF THE MONTH

I'VE ONLY PLAYED *Turrican 2*, so I'm not really in a position to compare this remake of *Turrican*, called *Hurrican*, to its retro progenitor. What I can do though, is judge it entirely on its own merits, which is to say that *Hurrican* is very good. It's the sort of platformer that fell out of popularity somewhere back in the '90s, with running around mindlessly shooting things being fairly central to the gameplay.

Actually, *Turrican* was brilliant because its levels were fully two-dimensional. It wasn't just a jog from the left side of the level to the right; it was a proper adventure through jungles and caverns and cavernous jungle-factories. *Turrican* was also brilliant because of its weapons, which spread themselves out across as many keys as possible. You, being the cyborg thing that you were, had three main weapons, each of which could be upgraded through a series of levels. A fairly standard blast cannon, a laser and a bouncing green orb made up this basic arsenal, with more complex weaponry like lasers (that you can literally point *anywhere*), morph balls and screen blasts giving you more buttons to press than you probably care for.

So yes, *Turrican* wasn't bad for a game that almost forgot to pretend it wasn't ripping off *Metroid*, and *Hurrican* is an excellent remake. It obviously looks far better than the original game too, with its rendered sprites and particle effects – and it even features a great flashy intro screen reminiscent of the Atari ST's hacked game intros. The game also has a barely passable two-player mode, which is fun if you don't mind rubbing shoulders with a friend while you both teleport madly about the screen.

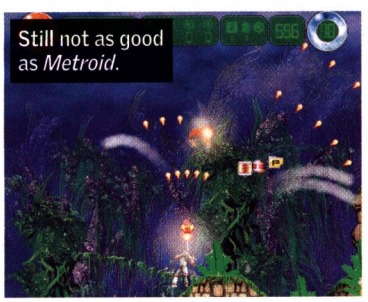
This is a treat for all, including *Turrican* fans, *Metroid* fans and fans of neither *Turrican* nor *Metroid*. It's demanding on the fingers if you want to use all of the weapons, but otherwise it's a nice coat of glossy on a fondly remembered oldie. Well done.



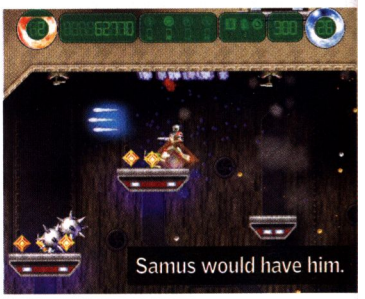
You're in there somewhere.



I got further than this, but forgot to take screenshots. Honest.



Still not as good as *Metroid*.



Samus would have him.

A GAME WITH A KITTY 2: DARKSIDE ADVENTURES

I like chicken, I like liver

Dev: Bernie | www.origamihero.com

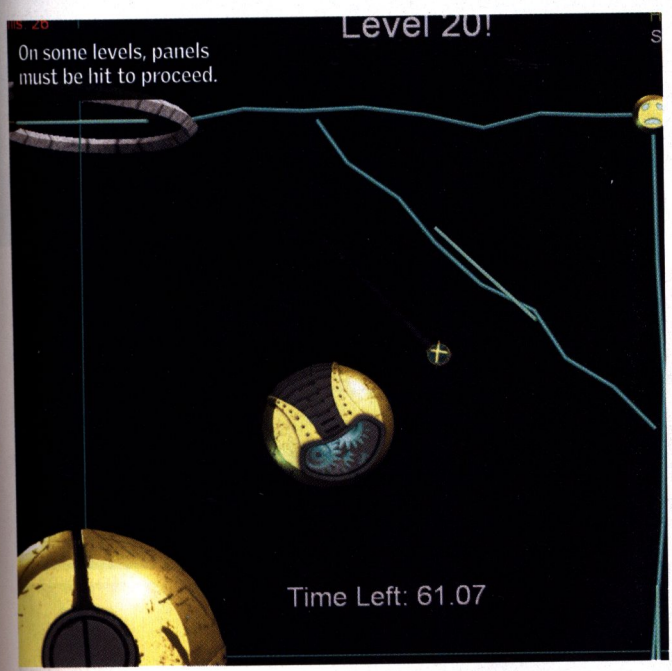
HERE'S ANOTHER BRIGHTLY coloured freeware platform adventure, this time a sequel to the adorable *A Game With A Kitty* (it had cats).

Instead of actually being the kitty however, this time you play as the grumpy arch-chancellor to the Imp King, and set off on an adventure to find a lost crown or to stroke some pink unicorns and dance around. As with the original, it's not a blindly humourless affair – characters are light-hearted, signposts are sarcastic, and the whole tone of the game appears to wallow and giggle in the otherworldly fantasy setting it's conjured up.

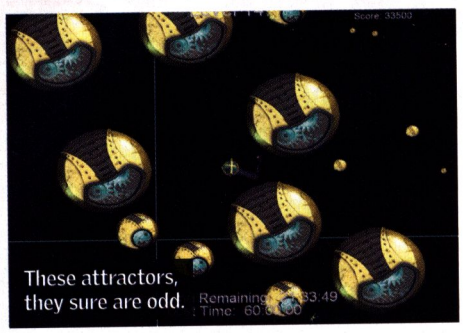
Your ability to pick up objects and throw them forms the game's main tactic, alongside the standard star-chucking, jumping, running and bomb-throwing. It all handles solidly too, and you rarely blame the controls after forgetting to press jump before a bottomless pit. The bosses are brilliantly designed things too, the first being a hatchet with an oddly placed hat (which, as your character points out, would look better on his pole) – they're easily the most enjoyable parts of the game.

Despite not taking all that long to beat, and the occasional dead-end room, *A Game With A Kitty 2: Darkside Adventures* is one of the most pleasing freeware platformers I've come across. It smacks of NES too, which is always a happy thing.









STRANGE ATTRACTORS

The gravity of the situation

Dev: Ominous | www.ominousdev.com

I THINK THAT *Strange Attractors* **is really good fun to play – it's certainly very interesting, but it's a weird one.**

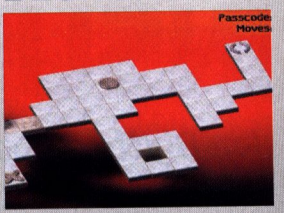
A finalist at the Independent Games Festival, it looks likely to bag the Most Innovative award – and it's deserving of it. The aim is to get your orb from the bottom of the screen to the top, using only your spacebar. Hitting the spacebar activates your gravity drive, dragging you towards the large metal spheres that litter the screen.

Critical timing of your key presses means you can, in theory, use this gravitational momentum to swing yourself in the direction you want to travel. In practice though, you'll find yourself ricocheting every which way, killing the little floating humans who scream as they're destroyed by physics. Gravity just isn't intuitive. It takes more patience than any one person could ever muster to keep at it, and as the levels go on they become more and more demanding of skills you never really have.

Still, it's genuine innovation, and pressing the spacebar over and over is always great for a laugh.

WEBGAME OF THE MONTH

BLOXORZ



www.albinoblacksheep.com/games/bloxorz

Even though it's called *Bloxorz*, this is an extremely clever puzzle game for clever people. You control a cuboid (that's a rectangular cube) on a platform made of tiles. Using the arrow keys, you flip the cuboid over and over to make it go where you want. If half of it hangs over an edge, it falls. It's not as easy as you might think, and requires bucketloads of lateral thought (the best kind of thought). The objective is to make your cuboid fall down a certain hole, which it can only do by putting its shortest end into it. This means you've got to manoeuvre your cuboid into the right position before slotting yourself in.

It gets tricky when you've no room to properly align yourself, and when switches and bridges amplify the difficulty, it turns into one of the best Flash puzzlers on the entire internet.



Tip: don't aim for the leaves. They are your friends.

INSURGENCY

PCZONE ON THE DVD

Jon Blyth keeps himself busy

insmod.net | Mod for: Half-Life 2

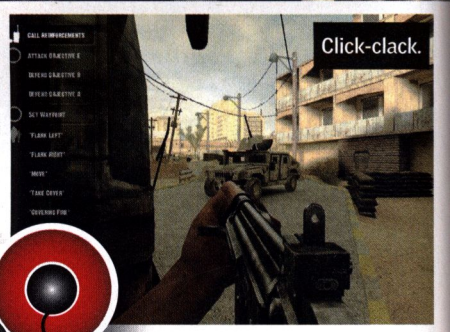
TWO DAYS AFTER we gave the *Insurgency* mod for *Half-Life 2* a run-through, Steam News issued an update, saying that the folk at Valve had been playing it too. This could explain why we were beaten stupid – although round here, any excuse is grabbed like a plank in the sea of our own shit.

Insurgency is a highly popular mod which attempts to recreate a realistic military approach to the current occupation of Iraq. Created by a Canadian ex-soldier, and passed on to Jeremy Blum – the co-founder of super-realistic mod-gone-commercial *Red Orchestra* – even before you play *Insurgency*, you feel like it'll have a touch of pedigree.

And it does; the game looks great, even if it's a darker, slower game than most; indoors is pitch-black compared to the glare and bloom of the dusty outdoors. In pursuit of realism, you've had your crosshairs removed (thanks a bunch, reality), so it's a game of cover and teamplay. Lone-wolf heroics will not be rewarded by the guys in the upper-storey windows who have got their iron-sights set on your big chin. If it wasn't for the level objectives, we'd have sat there all day.

The chain of command gives *Insurgency* a breath of novelty, without losing realism. Your squad of eight has a strict command hierarchy. The commander has access to a range of orders – flank the enemy, waypoint-setting, pursuing a specific objective – and if one side has a good commander, and is playing well as a team and the other isn't, the scores will show it.

One primary issue with the gameplay is that there's a lot of collateral damage due to the similarity of the models. It wasn't just us shooting our team-mates – the combat log was full of Yankie-on-Yankie violence. The Iraqis must have thought they were being occupied by the Marx Brothers.



Click-clack.

Play: MOD



The old Super-Glue-on-the-knee trick, played for laughs.

Play: MOD

DEPARTMENT STORE BATTLES

PCZONE ON THE DVD

Realism? Stick it where the sun don't shine

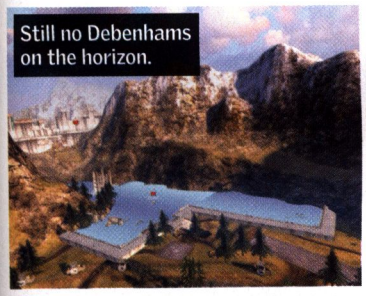
www.bf2battle.com | Mod for: Battlefield 2

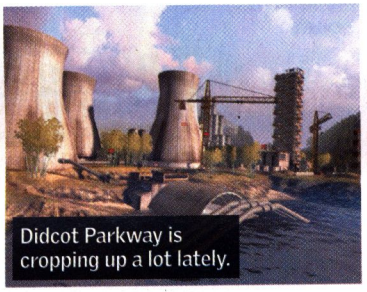
OK, FIRST THINGS first: this mod contains neither John Lewis or House Of Fraser. Which is a shame, because we'd have liked a link to the first, just to check if they really are never knowingly undersold.

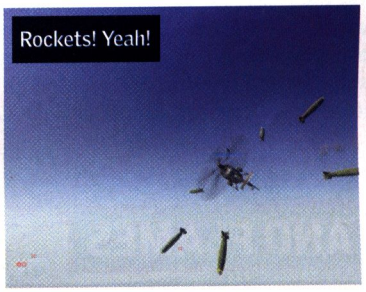
The *DSB* people use two quotes in the write-up for their mod. The first is: "No team has an advantage." This is presumably because every member of both team gets ridiculously souped-up vehicles, just as a matter of course. Handing out superpowers and leaving the game balanced is no mean feat, so what sounds like fairly faint praise is more complimentary than it sounds.

The other comment they've chosen to make public is: "So much fun you'll blow an O ring." Hell yeah! You be blowing O rings all in your pants! That's what it's all about: *Department Store Battles* wipes its arse on the subtle tactics of survival, then blows itself up with sheer over-excitement. Hovering jeeps, six-directional missiles from low-flying helicopters, this mod is what I'd be tempted to call – if I wasn't in my 30s – undiluted pwnage cordial.

So stuff realism, stuff it into a big daft pipe. You want physics-free jet-powered parachutes, and you know it. You want that jeep you're driving to take off and fly into the side of an aircraft carrier. Stop being the sniper, sitting there like a hypnotised baby. Get out there and blow shit up, and scream while you're doing it.


Still no Debenhams on the horizon.


Didcot Parkway is cropping up a lot lately.


Rockets! Yeah!

PROJECT FAR CRY

PCZONE ON THE DVD

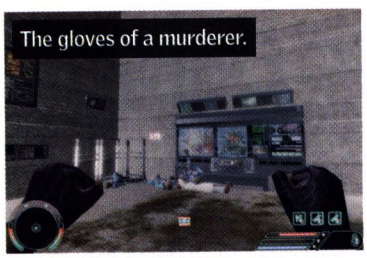
What a Carver-up!

projectfarcry.3dn.ru/news | Mod for: Far Cry v1.3

IF YOU'RE NOT keen on multiplayer mods – perhaps you're scared of the people or the all-too-desolate servers – then why not try *Project Far Cry* from vladtek. It's a Russian single-player mod, so if you visit the website, be ready for the crazy alphabets that seems to be a key part of being Russian.

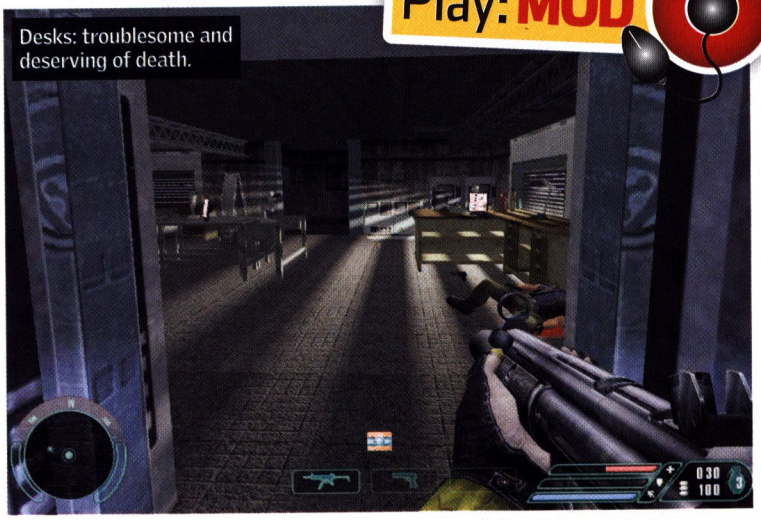
Project Far Cry follows the Carver plotline you know and love, and makes Jack into a mutant – like you'll know and (maybe) love if you played *Instincts* on the Xbox. Then, it adds seven new levels, although two are cheeky remakes of maps in the original. Like most fanfiction, it's obvious you're not dealing with the original, but it's a decent impression.

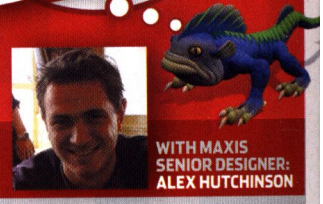
It's a sizey project for such a small development team, and there's some known issues and bug-gery to be fixed (mainly with frame-rate and AI), but if you raise your forgiveness thresholds, there's a hell of a lot to enjoy here. The developers seem humble (it's not as good as *Matto4*, they say) and they're keen to improve their mod, so check back to see if they've issued any upgrades or hotfixes since we went to press.


The gloves of a murderer.


The jungle! I knew there was something missing!

Play: MOD


Desks: troublesome and deserving of death.


INTELLIGENT DESIGN

WITH MAXIS SENIOR DESIGNER: ALEX HUTCHINSON

E3

Everybody keeps telling me that E3 is dead. What was formerly a deafening, excessive, seizure-inducing celebration of games has shrunk down to a more focused affair, and although I don't miss the overtime in the months leading up to it as we scratched together a demo, I feel a little sad to see the industry lose its big day. It was one of the few times the mainstream media paid any real attention to videogames, and getting a decent reception could mean life or death for some developers.

If a game already has a lot of buzz, then E3 was a chance to keep the ball rolling, show off new features and turning some of your promises into tangible realities. If you were announcing a new game or you were a small developer, then this was your chance to surprise some people and show them that you were making something special. It was also a chance to generate some much-needed excitement within the industry itself and challenge other developers. Often, I'd begin the week excited about the new game we were making, move through the middle of the week terrified by the brilliance of a select few competitors and depressed about my future, then end the week motivated to go back to work and make improvements.

But even as one show dies, others continue to rise. GDC has become a place for announcing new games as much as talking about their development, and Leipzig continues to grow as an event. In fact, we've decided to hold *Spore* back from E3 this year and instead put our demo together for Leipzig, where the press will get closer to it than ever before. So maybe E3 didn't die, it just moved overseas and learnt to like sauerkraut. What's all the fuss about?

SPORE IS DUE OUT IN 2008 – WWW.SPORE.COM

PC ZONE JACKASS

MAN'S BEST FRIEND



STARRING



WOOFS MCBONE



FRUITY BOOTS

It's reigning cats and dogs...

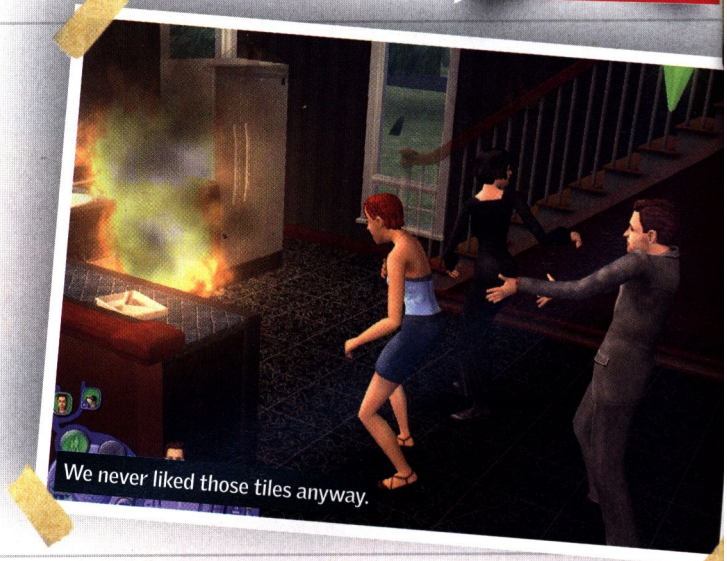
IF YOU'VE SEEN the film *Beethoven's 2nd*, you'll never forget the dream sequence in which there's a room full of St Bernard's puppies. If you're like us, you'll have come out of the cinema screaming that you wanted a room full of puppies, and if your mum's anything like ours, she'll have told you to piss off. So can *The Sims 2: Pets* be the solution to our childhood dreams of owning a super-pet who'd join us on adventures, and routinely unmask janitors? Let's see!

LICKED BY DOGS AND FLAMES

THE SET-UP:
We invited a group of friends around to dinner, and set about cooking them a meal. During the meal, we set fire to the kitchen. Would the dog leap into action? Would he put on his collar with cape attachment and fly around the house?

THE RESULT:
Woofs McBone sat and watched TV. He got up briefly, thought about TV, then decided to walk around the house – passing within feet of the screaming Sims. After walking a lap of the house, he noticed the fire, jumped into it and barked at famed *PCZ Sims* prodigy Barry Test, who was extinguishing the fire.

WE RECKON:
Woofs McBone lost his villainous nonchalance when he decided to jump into a fire. However, he was impervious to flame, so bonus hero points there.



We never liked those tiles anyway.



Woofs just didn't dig Savage Garden as much as Barry.

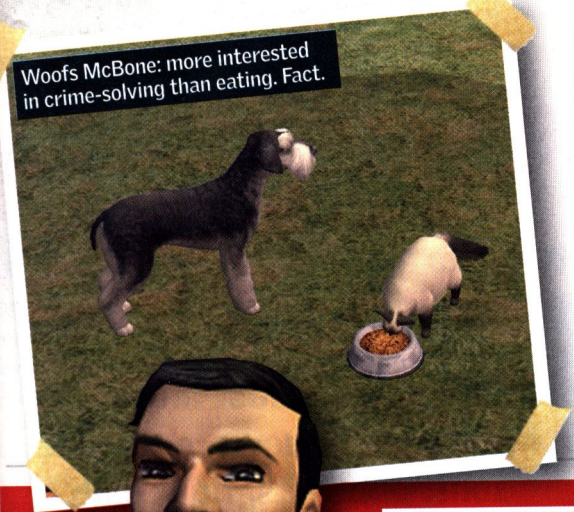
DISCO DAWG

THE SET-UP:
We built an enclosed area with experi-Sim Barry Test, his dog Woofs McBone, a glitterball and a music system. Barry played music until he died of a combination of exhaustion and starvation. Would Woofs have a musical interlude, like his '80s crime-solving counterpart, the Doo?

THE RESULT:
Primarily, Woofs barked at the speakers. When his master died, he howled, but not in tune with the music. Eventually the pet adoption agency picked him up.

WE RECKON:
Woofs continues to show signs of immortality, but the as-if-by-magic 'appearance' of the pet adoption agency ruined our attempt to test this power.

PCZONE PCZONE


Woofs McBone: more interested in crime-solving than eating. Fact.

CRIME-SOLVING WOOF

THE SET-UP:
Woofs McBone and his feline counterpart Fruity Boots were given a bowl of food. The food was then hidden. Which animal is best at finding concealed generic pet food?

THE RESULT:
Woofs went straight to the food, as though guided by an eerie pathfinding routine. Meanwhile, Fruity Boots – who has a stupid face – walked around slowly until she could be arsed to follow.

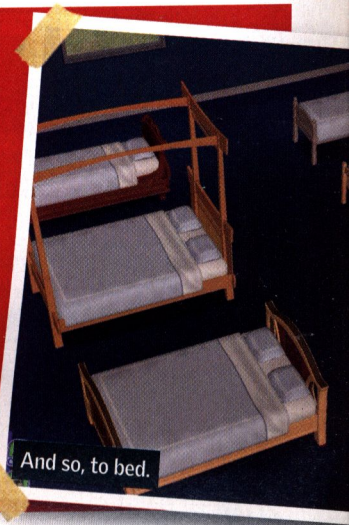
WE RECKON:
Dogs may happily wolf down horse shit, but they love a mystery; cats prefer to be mysterious. Which may explain why dogs keep barking at cats: they're trying to solve them.

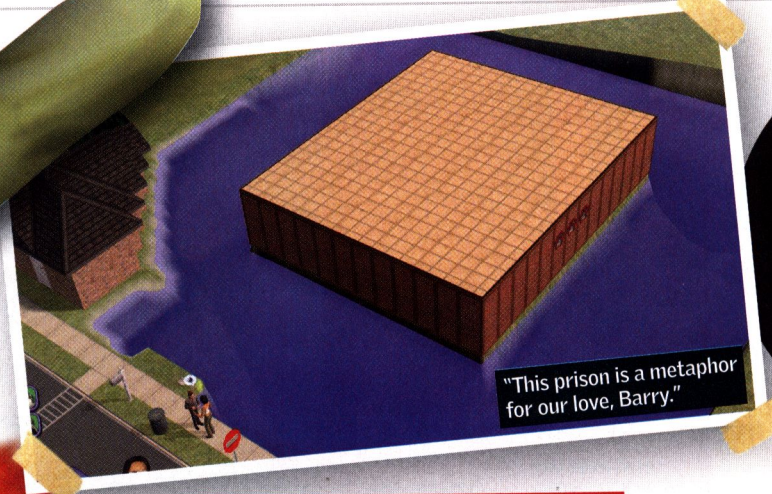
BED TIME FOR FRUITY BOOTS

THE SET-UP:
We filled a room with various beds. Which would our pets choose? And would they get it on?

THE RESULT:
Both pets abhorred the ostentatious Touch of Teak. At $1,800, the opulence revolted them and they clawed and chewed it into disrepair. Fruity Boots opted to sleep on the respectable St Ajoque bed ($1,200), and Woofs McBone, our down-to-earth Gumshoe hero, went for the $700 Daydreamer.

WE RECKON:
The sexual tension is palpable! Our pets may come from different worlds, and they fight tooth and claw, but they get the job done, and don't care if a few beds get eaten in the process.


And so, to bed.


"This prison is a metaphor for our love, Barry."

SEND US YOURS!

Have you found ways to play games in ways the developers never intended? Take a screenshot, video or just tell us what you did, and we'll print the best and put them online at www.pczone.co.uk. Email letters@pczone.co.uk, entitling your email 'PC ZONE Jackass'. Fame and prizes await!

THE GREAT LIVE-OFF

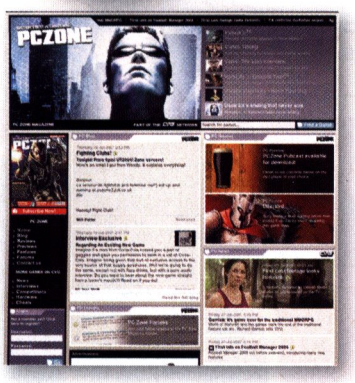
THE SET-UP:
We built a prison – two layers of walls, surrounded by a moat – and locked Woofs and Fruity into a small room. Their respective owners, Barry and Meredith Test, were given a shed with an outhouse, but were not allowed to see, feed or interact with their pets. Which animal can survive monstrous neglect the longest?

THE RESULT:
The two animals became friends, playing with each other. They occasionally fought, but all seemed well. Things remained in a state of inter-species bliss until Barry and Meredith set fire to each other. After a period of unexplained mourning, the animals were teleported out of their prison by the shadowy adoption agency, and we were left alone in a barren Sims landscape.

WE RECKON:
As far as special powers go, we've proved a telepathic link and the ability to teleport, but it's not demonstrated until their owner dies. The only scientific conclusion is that pets are parasitical brain devourers, who must leave when their host dies. Shocking, but science. PCZ

Online Zone

www.pczone.co.uk



Can't wait for the next *PC ZONE*? Don't panic! Just hit www.pczone.co.uk now for up-to-the-minute news, exclusive features, forums, special competitions, pubcasts, fight club news, online chats and the *PC ZONE* blog!



NOTES FROM THE FORUM

A toast to the posts we likes the mosts!

Jonny_p66 kicked off an old favourite topic this month... What's the shittest game you've ever played?

"Personally, I feel *Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness* wins the turkey crown for me. They just did so many things wrong... I mean, whose idea was it to give Lara a 'darker, more adult appeal'?"

Jonny_p66

"Always, ALWAYS *H.E.D.Z.* Playing that was like sucking shite out of a dead dalmatian. However, I'll vote for *Daikatana*, out of principle."

Csdaveuk

"Surely *Boiling Point: Road To Hell* is in with a chance? Dogsnob – pure unadulterated dogsnob."

Yakkern

"Shut your mouth!"

G_Man_007

"The thing with *Deus Ex: Invisible War* was, its prequel was just a bit too good. I enjoyed *Invisible War*, but only after I started pretending it wasn't the sequel to *Deus Ex*."

psychoseal

"The problem isn't when a game reeks of console. The problem is when it goes down the 'jack of all trades' route. By not selecting one market properly, they made *Invisible War* far less attractive to either group. A fatal mistake as I recall, as the game flopped and the developers were shut down."

Speakafreaka

"Saying *Invisible War* was a little less freeform is like saying Duncan Goodhew is a little thin on top! *Runs outside and howls at the moon: 'Why, Spector? WHY?'*"

Dogen_D_Derrible



H.E.D.Z.: worst game ever?

ON THE BLOG

PCZONE 2007

What's been happening on *ZONE's* web diary this month...

WILL WENT TO E3 this month, and was kind enough to write a daily blog about his adventures. He gushed a tiny gush for *UT3*, he was eye-rollingly disparaging about the Microsoft announcements and then got all soggy again for *Crysis* and *BioShock*.

Meanwhile, and far less successfully, Steve and Log attempted to parody the most annoying bullshit answers you get from developers trying to convince you how shockingly innovative their new game is. It didn't go far enough – all the comments seemed to think it was genuine. Don't go into stand-up, fellas.

Watch out in the coming month for some excellent video stuff. We're saying this mainly to create a sense of obligation. It's sometimes difficult to justify arsing around with a camera when you've got a magazine to write. But we've got pagefuls of ideas that are only just outside the range of our abilities, so keep an eye on the blog, at www.pczone.co.uk.



PCZONE PUBCAST!

Download the team's exclusive website-only pubcast NOW!

POSTCARDS FROM THE EDGE

WIN!

Send us your MMO character screenshots to win stuff...

You already know all about our '*PC ZONE* Around The World' bit in Letters, where we ask you to send in your photos of yourself holding your favourite mag all over the globe. Well now, you're cordially invited to send us screenshots of you or your clan in your favourite MMO with a brief, jolly explanation of what you're up to. The best two postcards sent to us every month at letters@pczone.co.uk will be printed here and win a PC game. Get snapping...

FIGHT CLUB

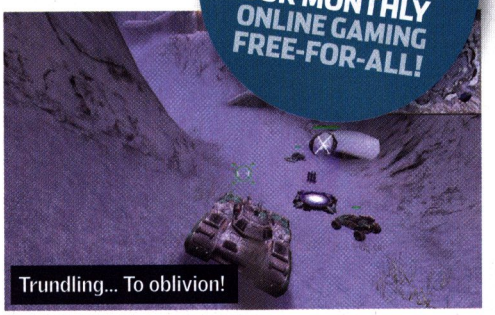
Now with 100% fewer club rules

COME AND TAKE ON THE ZONE STAFF IN OUR MONTHLY ONLINE GAMING FREE-FOR-ALL!

SUZY WAS IN her element this month – *Unreal Tournament* is her multiplayer game of choice, because, "you can get killed and still have fun". You've got to love that immediate respawn.

Log turned up early, and successfully pissed off PPP-ISDN by shooting him. Of course, this being Log, he missed, but it's still pretty embarrassing when there are only three people on the map and you choose to attack your team-mate.

Then Steve, Will and Suzy piled in, more readers turned up and the Onslaught began. Nodes were won, lost, heads were minced with Manta propellers and legs were sliced off. Everyone agreed that *UT* was more fun than anyone remembered, and the constantly changing teams stopped anyone from getting too pissed off about being saddled with Log. It also makes it hard to declare a winner, although PPP-ISDN turned out to be as good as his network-themed name suggested.



Trundling... To oblivion!

Back to the old faithful next month. All these other games are amazing, but you can always be sure of a good crowd with *CS: Source*. Don't complain, you told me that was your favourite. See you there, breathing in the heady dust on Thursday, August 23 at 6pm sharp. And don't be late, it's just plain rude.

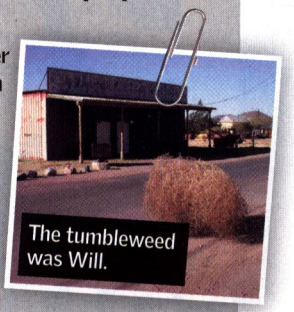


PPP-ISDN – more internet than human now.

ZONE CHAT

All together now: "Compo pls"

IT TOOK THE brave form of a solo Will Porter to address the masses in this month's thrilling instalment of *ZONE* Chat. First on the list of discussion topics was a bloke with a moniker that had something to do with trousers (Will's memory isn't what it was) being really excited about EVERYTHING. After which formalities were dropped and the usual staccato drumbeat of "Competition?" "When's the competition?" "Is there a compo tonight?" began in earnest. As they always do. Trousers ran away with the plaudits for naming cigarette-puffing ethereal spirit Chris Anderson as the *ZONE* editor who ruled in the days pre-Woods. But that didn't stop everyone pretending to be him to steal his hard-earned prize. Next *ZONE* Chat is Wednesday, August 22 at 5.30pm. Be there, or be eating your tea.



The tumbleweed was Will.

How to join in!

If you fancy joining the *ZONE* Chat, you need an IRC program and an internet connection. We recommend mIRC, and you can find it on side two of our DVD. Just install, set the options, devise an online identity, connect to a QuakeNet server nearest to you, type /join #pcz into the command line, and hey presto, you're there! Chatting with the friendliest bunch of online readers you could hope to find. Remember, play nice and don't be rude.

Can't make Fight Club?

If you can't make it to Fight Club – perhaps you're too busy frolicking in flood waters to give two hoots – then join other *PCZ* readers on the following public servers. Who knows, some of us might even be there. The latest info can be found at www.pczone.co.uk.

WHO'S WHO

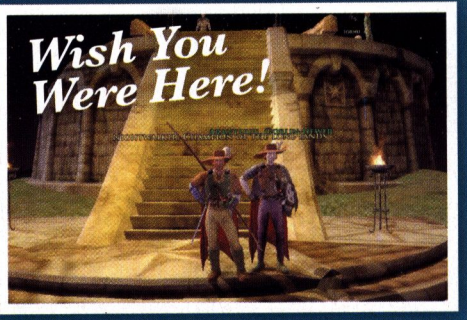
Jamie Sefton PCZ_NorthernScum
Will Porter PCZ_Batsphinx
Suzy Wallace PCZ_Uzibat
Steve Hogarty PCZ_escaped_monkey
Phil Wand PCZ_People's Front Of Judea
Jon Blyth PCZ_Log

1. **COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE**
   cs.zonegames.co.uk:27015
   cs.zonegames.co.uk:27025
2. **HALF-LIFE 2 DEATHMATCH**
   hl2.zonegames.co.uk:27065
3. **DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE**
   dod.zonegames.co.uk:27085
4. **TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC**
   tfc.zonegames.co.uk:27045
5. **WOLFENSTEIN: ENEMY TERRITORY**
   et.zonegames.co.uk:27960
6. **PREY**
   prey.zonegames.co.uk:27719
7. **BATTLEFIELD 2142**
   bf2142.zonegames.co.uk:16567
8. **JOINT OPERATIONS: TYPHOON RISING**
   Listed in NovaWorld



"Hi everyone back home. Having a great time in *Guild Wars*, up until ten minutes ago. This is what always happens when you go out for a stroll with your friends. RUNNNNN!"

Dannyboy
(Danny Longstaffe)



"Hey dudes, here's me and a fellow *ZONER* hanging out near the Forest of Fornost, in Minas Vrun, where we're about to hand out some severe ass-whuppin' to some naughty goblins. For Wrath, for Ruin, for *PC ZONE*!"

Nightwalker
(Chris J Capel)

RetroZONE

Coin-op's false start...

COMPUTER SPACE

EMULATION OF THE MONTH

MAME EMULATES THOUSANDS of coin-ops. *Space Invaders* – the game that captivated children and pensioners alike with its insane magickery – is emulated, along with hundreds of Japanese versions.

One game is notable by its absence from the MAME list though – *Computer Space*. It introduced the world to the elegant bespoke cabinet, a cabinet that resembled nothing more than a sad-faced robot ghost with an angular bulge it wanted you to press.

The game itself was a forerunner to *Asteroids*, in that you could rotate left, right, thrust and fire. The enemies were just two ships that would appear and glide in formation around the screen. Play to the count of 90 – if you beat the computer, you win another 90 seconds. Simple, easy and easily fiddled, *Computer Space* offered endless, repetitive play for anyone who knew how to exploit the game's blind spots.

There were only 1,500 of these benign plastic creatures made, but they lacked the drama, progression and high-score record to fuel proper addiction – that would fall to *Space Invaders*, seven years later. But it stank of the future – the makers of *Soylent Green* thought that women in billowing space frocks would still be playing it in the year 2022, and Woody Allen took the hapless game as far forward as 2173 in the film *Sleeper*.

Raise a glass to *Computer Space*, and the makers – one of whom would go on to create *Pong*, which is probably the last game that most of our parents ever played. Just for a while, gaming was a family thing.







BUT HOW?

Computer Space may not have had any ROM or RAM, but that didn't stop it being remade in 2005 by Moose O'Malley. Well done him.

There are two versions, but they both fix the scoring bug that allowed you to loop the computer's score back to zero. So, it's not so much an emulation as a loving remake. Beware! It's not much fun, and seeing as very few of us actually played the game, this is entirely missing the point of nostalgia as a common experience. Erm, hooray!

Links...

1. **Moose O'Malley's software valley**
   snipr.com/comp_space
   The page on which you can find *Computer Space*
2. **Retro Remakes**
   www.retroremakes.com
   That place we just can't mention often enough

FACT FILE

Tantalising *Computer Space* trivia...



ATARI LOGO
Bill Nutting and Nolan Bushnell created *CS* – after a disagreement, Bushnell left to form Atari.



GRAPH GOING DOWN
Too complex and yet a bit too simple, sales were not considered a success. Half went unsold.

IT'S TASTY HUMANS
In *Soylent Green*, the man who owned a *CS* cabinet got his head lamped in with a crowbar. Jealous, much?



MEN OF FIBRE
The cabinet came in maroon, green, yellow, blur and white. Only the white one resembled a sad randy ghost.





ZERO TECH
The cabinet had no RAM, no ROM or micro-processor. It ran on diodes, transistors and pixie wiffle powder.

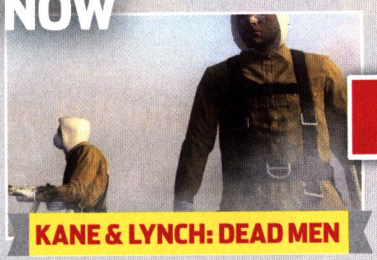


GALAXY GAME
The non-commercial *Galaxy Game* preceded *CS* by weeks, but wasn't in the film *Jaws*, so who cares?

NOW & THEN

Kane & Lynch: Dead Men vs *Rainbow Islands*

NOW



KANE & LYNCH: DEAD MEN

THEN



RAINBOW ISLANDS

Here we go on our monthly attempt to highlight the rich ancestry of modern gaming. This month's foolhardy proposition is that *Kane & Lynch* is so similar to *Rainbow Islands* as to be a spiritual sequel. In *Kane & Lynch*, a trained killer and a medicated psychopath play co-op, to rescue a loved one.

Bub and Bob have hundreds of levels of murdering experience, and they now kill without remorse or expression. When they have shown love, it was in the form of a heart appearing above their heads. The perception of purely internal emotions as external forces? Doesn't that sound a little... schizophrenic? Not to mention the fact that they're boys now, and they used to be bubble-coughing dragons. There's got to be some unaddressed mental trauma tucked away from that episode. Keep taking those potions, boys.

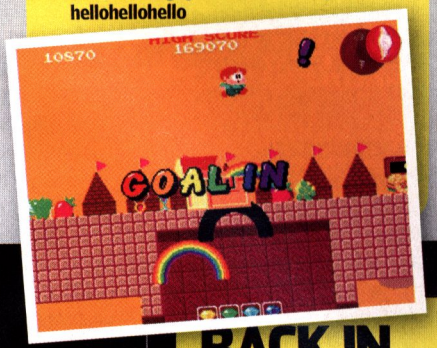
Finally, Bub and Bob have to fight their way through seven rainbow-themed worlds, each with its own boss; in *Dead Men*, Kane's family is being held by an organisation called... The Seven.

If the final scenes of *Kane & Lynch* feature a showdown between two gruff bastards and a massive cartoon ladybird, then we'll consider our gaming life complete.

PLAY IT!

What with *Rainbow Islands: Revolution* being such a let-down on the DS, you're best off with the original. So now, it's time to be coy about piracy, as we give you the links you need to break the law, along with a request that you don't use them, not even once...

1. **Download MAME32. The copy at ROMnation doesn't require you to sign up to anything. Go to: snipr.com/mame32 for that one.**
2. **Google the ROM for *Rainbow Islands*. Through a unique method of clicking buttons it may well become obtainable.**
3. **Are you breaking the law now? Why not ask the guys at MAME? snipr.com/hellohellohello**



MAME FRAME



Snow Bros

Developer: Toaplan | Year: 1990

Whereas *Kane & Lynch* doesn't owe such an obvious tilt of the hat to *Rainbow Islands*, *Snow Bros* is very much the idiot-child of *Bubble Bobble*.

Nick and Tom are hell-bent, for no reason explained in the intro sequence, on battling their way through level after level of monsters. This is the first annoying thing – I don't care if it's just a three-second screen saying, 'Nana has been blown out of a window – GO!' followed by utterly irrelevant gameplay, I like being told why I'm doing something. In *Bubble Bobble*, I was saving my girlfriend. In *Snow Bros*, I'm just engaged in some blank, nihilistic spree.

To describe *Snow Bros* to a stranger, you just have to say: "Take *Bubble Bobble*. Replace bubbles with snowballs, and fruit with sushi. Add a boss every ten levels, and make it really hard." *Snow Bros* – one of the games that stopped us playing games, and made us want to join our families playing miniature golf.



Who stole my sparklers?



Behind you! Also, in front and above...

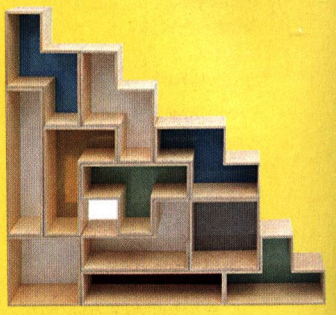


All dead in one go = big sushi.

WHAT IS MAME?

MAME is the Multiple Arcade Machine Emulator, currently emulating over 6,000 games. You can download it from www.mame.net – use Mame32 for a nice front-end. Then you can download *Robby Roto*, which is legal. You can play all the others too, but not legally. So stop it. Right now.

BACK IN THE DAY...



TETRIS

By Clare Lydon

In 1994, somebody was stupid enough to give me my first job, and with it, my first laptop. And so I was able to pretend to work while searching for porn on the internet and playing *Tetris*.

I was meant to be teaching undergraduates sociology, but soon, my afternoons and evenings were filled slotting falling blocks into blocks, with no apparent end in sight. My whole world became block-shaped. I even began not watching the 5.35pm repeat of *Neighbours* so I could play – that's when I knew it was serious.

I understand *Tetris* is back in fashion now, but I've moved on to more sophisticated games: *Zookeeper* rules.

SUPERTEST

WORST EVER GAMES

PCZONE ON THE DVD

And we all know that there have been many solid contenders...

YOUR VIEW

Last month was all about sci-fi – what games have advanced the genre since *Elite*? Here's what you said...

SHOCKED BY THE POWER
"Well, obviously *System Shock 2* would have to rank right up there. What else?"
cjw101

NO PLACE LIKE IT
"*Homeworld* and its standalone expansion *Cataclysm* hit all of my sci-fi buttons good and proper. The game had a proper epic feel to it, and I think that the amazing amount of backstory they provided us with in the manual added to the whole package."
SunScramble

FLIGHT OF FANCY
"*Freespace 2* is the best ship-to-ship combat game, oh yes. Flying down the barrel of an annoyed capital ship with all your major sub-systems ablaze but only needing one more hit to disable its engines... It gets no better. The other standout title is *Startopia*: great graphics and gameplay."
csdaveuk

FLAWED GENIUS
"*Freelancer*. Yes, it was ultimately a flawed game and if you tried to stray too far from the main story the vacuum of real gameplay became all too apparent, but damn, I loved that game. I can't quite put my finger on it, but it just felt right in so many ways. I still think it's vastly underrated."
Dogen_D_Derrible

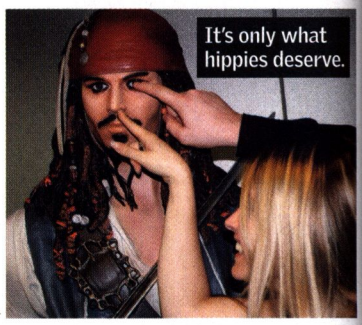
A MAN DOING a poop. This is the rusty badge of dishonour we emblazon on any game awful enough to warrant being represented by a person actually in the act of defecating. He's not even using a toilet, he's just going right there on the floor like some homeless animal.

Now, you might think it's all *BioShock* this and *Crysis* that here at *PC ZONE*, but in reality it's not. It's more like being trapped in the Crystal Dome, but instead of gold and silver tinfoil we're surrounded by rubbish games, and instead of jumping about excitedly, we're crying into our keyboards, cowering from the plastic casing flying about at deadly speeds. Great games are a rare whiff of Febreze in an otherwise toxic wasteland of arse.

We all sat down to have a talk about the worst games we've ever dumped on, and with poor Log having dumped on more than his fair share of sub-standard offal, we all felt inclined to agree that the recent *Little Britain: The Computer Game* cash-in (issue 180, 7%) was the most reprehensible thing we've ever seen. Suzy's been playing *Pippa Funnell* games for years and can earnestly attest to their decline in quality from 'bad' to 'life-threatening'. Steve, our *Sims* correspondent, has an unprofessional vendetta against all content packs, while Will seemed to hate some game that nobody else had heard of.

Check it out on the DVD, and then chime in on the forums at www.pczone.co.uk for your chance to be in that column just to the left! PCZ


This is Will after his morning coffee...


It's only what hippies deserve.


Who's the daddy?

"Great games are a whiff of Febreze in an otherwise toxic wasteland of arse"
Not funny, just shite.

STEVE HILL'S NeverQuest



Steve Hill wipes the slate clean in Richard Garriott's *Tabula Rasa*...

LORD BRITISH IS now General British. I know this because he's stood in front of me, in full costume, a 46-year-old man dressed as a sci-fi general. Richard Garriott to his friends and family, he's trapped me in a windowless hotel room in Los Angeles to show me *Tabula Rasa*, the game that he pledges will revolutionise the massively multiplayer online role-playing genre.

At the end of the presentation, a German journalist pulls out a silver coin and challenges Garriott, who instantly responds by pulling a gold coin out of his skin-tight space pants, part of some pre-ordained goblin-fanciers ritual. It's a confusing start to the pared-down E3, but the pain is eased when I'm given a goody bag with untold freebies.

GERM WARFARE

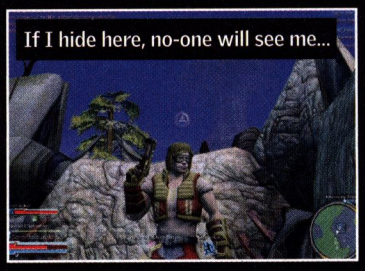
Back in Britain, that same goody bag yields a plastic card embossed with a pictographic language, a barcode and the words 'AFS clearance'. What can it mean? Maybe AFS are having a sale? I could do with some new shelves. Closer inspection reveals a unique beta code inviting me in to the wonderful and frightening world of *Tabula Rasa*, a Latin term meaning 'clean slate,' used to convey the epistemological thesis that individual human beings are born with no innate mental content.

Mulling over this deep and meaningful concept, I apprehensively type in the 20-character code and wait. And wait. And wait. A full day later, I'm ready to step into the trousers of General British. Asked to select a name, I opt for Steve Hill, only to be told 'that name is in use' as indeed is Stephen Hill. Gripped by paranoia that various doppelgangers of myself are roaming around with no innate mental content, I begrudgingly opt for a randomly generated name. Offered the uninspiring Darren Halins, I spin the moniker dice once more, and am given Germ Boutuzolehtin. I also opt for a random appearance, entering this world as a second-rate Beckham lookey-likey.

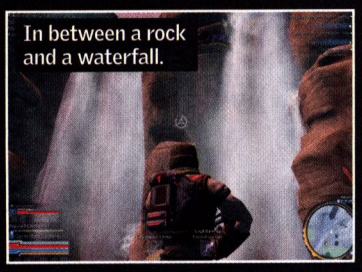
Finding my bearings, it's open sci-fi type place, and the first voice I hear is that of the unseen Chapman, who bemoans: "Ah crud, my shirt and cannon have went missing. I wanted to use my launcher to kill myself." It's a fairly bleak sentiment, but the helpful Jearom suggests that it's "probably in your footlocker".

WHITE LIGHTNING

Reporting to Commander Elvers, he puts me through basic training before sending me into the field where I make my first kill, slaying a Thrax Rifleman with my puny pistol. Makes me feel good, makes me feel like a man. It may be the pressure of war, but I soon find myself in conversation with a giant holographic woman who orders me to bring her the head of The Collector using my lightning ability. She's speaking literally, as a burst of lightning emanates from my sweaty palms, beheading the unfortunate hoarder and enabling me to make the macabre gift.



If I hide here, no-one will see me...



In between a rock and a waterfall.

I opt for a random appearance, and end up looking like a second-rate Beckham

This act of electricity-based slaughter earns me access to a base camp where I'm greeted by Officer McHenry, who explains: "Sure, Alia Das is an unruly pisshole, but at least it's our unruly pisshole. You'll get used to it, trust me."

I don't really trust anyone, but I do get talking to John Knoxville, who agrees to be my friend, as does Vorsuke Akatsuki. It's an unlikely alliance, but together we slay some warthog-type creatures called Boargars, and sell their tusks for credits. This isn't what I signed up for...

FLABBY WINGS

Nevertheless, graduation day soon looms and Soldier Trainer Bukowski gives me my wings, along with a couple of abilities, including Rage, enabling me to go feral at the drop of a hat. I can finally call myself a soldier, but it's not as gung-ho as it sounds, and I spend much of my time in quiet reflection, even learning elements of an alien language. It's a varied living, and at one stage I team up with a few good old boys to clear some caves of the squid-like Promethium Miasma. Not content with this, the mining coordinator then gets me to secure its safety by warding off some Treebacks because "they weigh a shit ton" and are causing structural damage.

After toiling away as a glorified farmer, finally I'm offered a real mission with a real name: River Recon. Teamed up with the similarly skilled Bure Obscure, we're to head up river and terminate somebody with extreme prejudice. It's a perilous task that can only be completed by soldiers at the peak of their powers, working in unison as a two-man killing machine.

"Do you know how to get there?" asks Bure. "My mission is in German..." PCZ



Like, cosmic.



"What do you mean, you didn't bring a picnic?"

DEVELOPER'S COMMENTARY

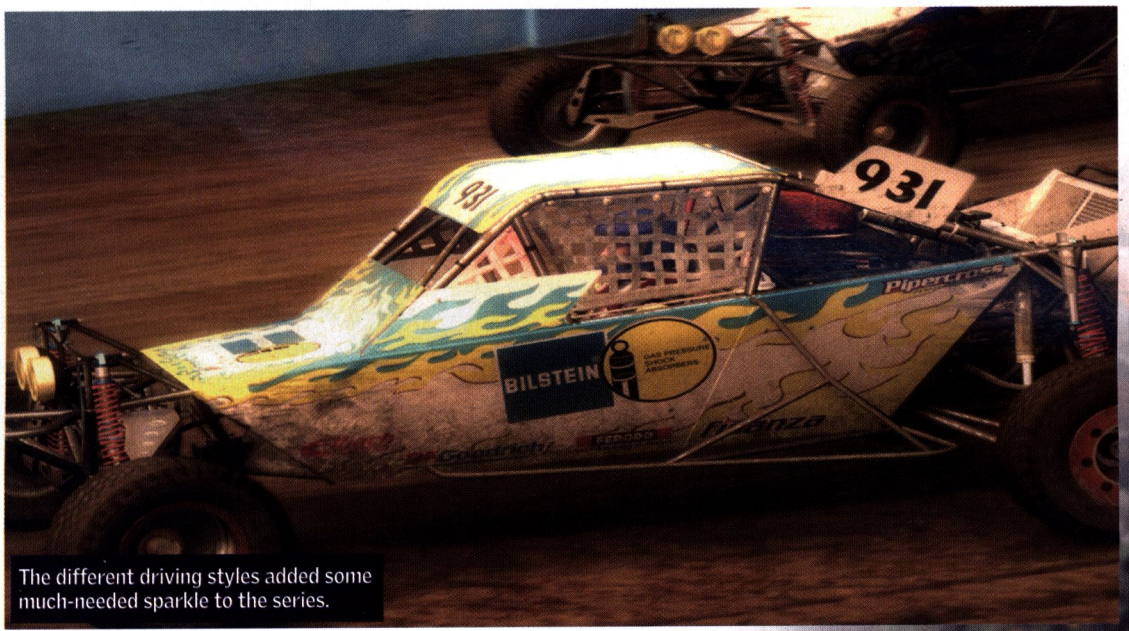
COLIN MCRAE: DIRT



***Suzy Wallace* has a look under the bonnet of *Colin McRae: DiRT*....**



AFTER YEARS OF annual iterations, in 2006 the Codemasters team finally took a year out from *Colin McRae*. Only for, this year, to burst back onto the scene with *Colin McRae: DiRT*. Complete with gorgeous new engine, new racing disciplines and a distinctly American twist, the new title was a breath of fresh air for the series. We gathered together (clockwise, from back) lead environment artist Peter Ridgway, principle audio lead Stafford Bawler, producer Alex Grimbley and lead programmer Adam Askew to discuss what tinkering and fine-tuning they've done to the series...



The different driving styles added some much-needed sparkle to the series.

01 **A CLEAN START:** Grimbley: "It had been a while since the last version had been out, so there was a couple of years break. In the meantime, we developed Neon, which is basically our new engine for running the game. It was really an opportunity to take a bit of a breather, take a step back from doing year-to-year iterations and just think: "What can we do to freshen it up a bit?" Sales had been dropping off with the franchise towards the latter versions, so we wanted to inject some freshness and create a bit of a spark so that people picked up on it. Plus, by doing so, it was also a lot more fun to work on.

"We wanted to try and get across to the players out there that the game had changed and it wasn't just about rallying. *DiRT* seemed to capture that, that the game covered other areas of motorsport. Although there were some amusing alternatives which we unfortunately can't reveal here!"

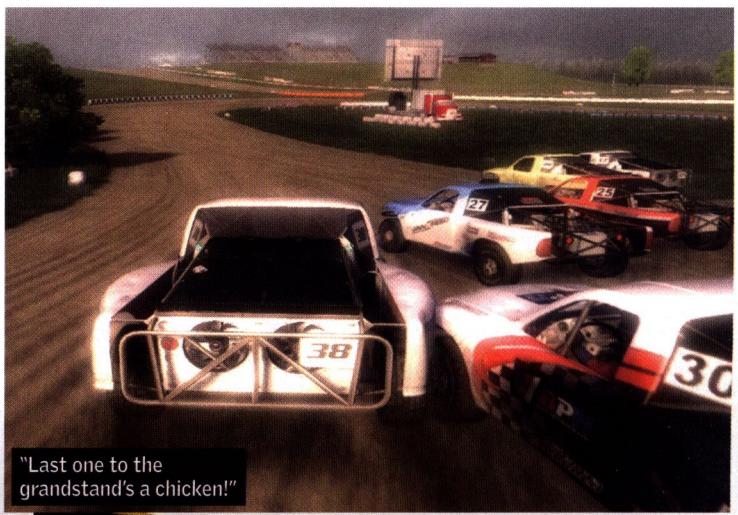


The man himself: Mr Colin McRae.

02 **MCRAE OF SUNSHINE:** Grimbley: "Throughout the development process, Colin visited the studio probably once a month. He still had a big say over the cars in particular. He's a gamer himself, so he knows how the cars should handle in-game. Also, with his wealth of experience and the unbelievable amount of cars that he's driven in the real-world, he can give feedback directly on handling and say: "No, that car doesn't feel anything like that. It's far too heavy or far too light." He also advised us on little things like what does a driver does in a crash, how he braces himself, how he changes gear and all that kind of thing."

03 **AMERICAN PIE:** Grimbley: "The *TOCA* series and the *McRae* series have been hugely popular in Europe. The only missing piece of the jigsaw has been the States, so we wanted to try and address that. Travis Pastrana is pretty high-profile over there from his motocross and people are aware that he's moving over to rallying so they're thinking, 'What's this rallying that Travis is doing? Oh look, there's a rally game out there. Fantastic.'

"So we approached him. Because of his rallying experience and move from motocross, we thought: 'Cool guy, young and he's got the right attitude.' He saw what we were trying to do with the brand and thought it was a good idea. We did have some other people lined up to narrate for different versions, but Travis was the guy who came across best. We know that it didn't go down that well with some areas of the market, but the majority of people seem to have understood our decision and accepted it."



"Last one to the grandstand's a chicken!"

"Colin visited the studio regularly – he's a gamer, and so knows how the cars should handle"

Alex Grimbley, producer, *Colin McRae: DiRT*

"You've always hated me in this colour helmet? What's that supposed to mean?"

"We're not allowed to set fire to the cars, as that implies that people could be injured"
Alex Grimbley, producer, *Colin McRae: DiRT*

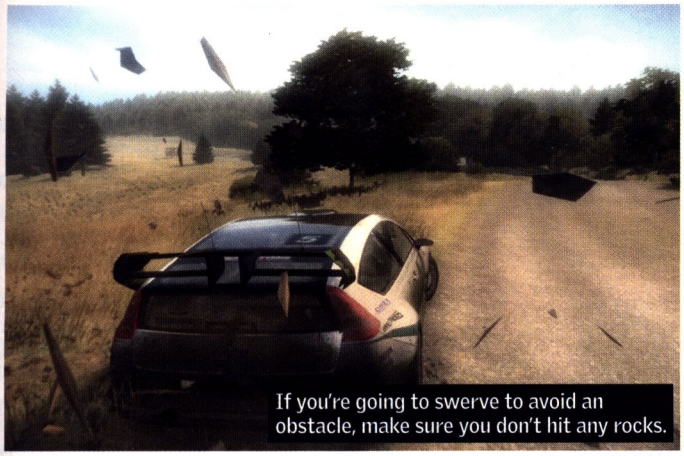
04 **GETTING UP TO SPEED:** Grimbley: "We've taken the whole team to various track-days where they've had experience of driving cars right from Caterhams and Porsche 911s to single-seaters. On top of that, we send our design and handling/physics teams out to various rally schools. Obviously, being in the Midlands, there's loads of different companies round here such as Prodrive. They handle cars on skid pans and all that stuff. Also, people have been driven round by Colin on some forest stages. That was up in Scotland a while ago – Colin was testing his Escort out and they got to sit in the co-driver's seat. As well as that, the guy who did the force-feedback on the steering wheels and invented some of the car physics is actually an FIA licence holder and used to drive touring cars in Hungary. He's quite experienced, so he knows what he's doing with the wheel."



Check. Out. My. Lights.

05 **CAR SHOPPING:** Grimbley: "In order to include a car, we first have to approach the manufacturers. Once we gain access to the cars, we take hundreds of photographs and get any kind of technical detail we can lay our hands on. But we also go a couple of steps further and actually question people who've driven the car to try and find out about its nuances. It's then modelled in-game and we might have to send the manufacturers a screenshot, pull them into the studio or let them have a go on the car themselves – basically, trying to get their approval. Only when they're happy and they say 'that's a good representation of our car', do we then get approval to use it in-game.

"Obviously, our damage model is probably the most extensive in any racing game, so manufacturers think, 'Oh, hold on a second, you're going to smash my brand new car up' – so we do have to work quite hard to negotiate with them. However, once they see how it works in-game, they normally go with it. The only thing we're not allowed to do is to set fire to cars. I think it's because the characters can't get out and it implies that people could be injured."



If you're going to swerve to avoid an obstacle, make sure you don't hit any rocks.

06 **OBSTACLE AVOIDANCE:** Askew: "A lot of effort went into the behaviour of the damageable track objects, in order to ensure that they reacted realistically when struck and caused sensible levels of damage to the vehicles. We also wanted this to influence gameplay too. For instance, if you're heading towards a metal-framed advertising banner which has been knocked onto the track, you may choose to plough straight through it rather than risk an accident with another vehicle by swerving. However, if you were heading towards a tyre stack in the same situation, you'd take your chances with the other vehicle!"

Ridgway: "If you do go off into the bushes, some of them will bend out of the way and damage the car, and some of the advertising banners and Armco won't just stop the car, they'll actually deform and crease out of the way. In addition, if you take a corner really well, flat out and your tyres are right near the edge of the track skidding round, we made it so that you can hit all the mesh and the poles at the edge of the tracks, and they'll just ping out and the mesh deforms around the car. That way, it looks cool and doesn't punish the player."

07 **IT'LL POLISH OUT:** Askew: "Our damage engine was worked on by our senior physics programmers, one of whom draws from personal motor-racing experience. Underneath the damage engine we have finite element model simulation, which drives the level of deformation that's applied to the vehicle components. In addition, the vehicle artists have the ability to configure each car individually. This includes specifying the physical properties on a per-component basis. In the game, you'll observe exterior panels that scratch, dent and ultimately fall off, revealing structural components of the vehicle."

Ridgway: "The team would separate the car into loads of different meshes so that the actual meshes could detach. If you hit a wing and the wing damages sufficiently, it actually crumples and separates off. This means the car's made up of different body parts, in the same way that the real-world version would be."



"OK, which joker took the door off?"



Crowds jeer if you don't entertain them.

08 **MAKING A RACKET:** Bawler: "We wanted to make the audio as dynamic as possible. When the car crashes, the way the sounds are triggered and mixed together mean you never really hear exactly the same crash-sounds twice. You can hear the bumper, the wings and the headlights all deforming and smashing as well, all made from separate component sounds. A few hours in a scrapyard smashing up cars with a sledgehammer were really well spent, so we got a lot of great sounds together for this system.

"While we did spend a lot of time on the really obvious stuff like engine sounds and crashes, there's a lot of really cool subtle stuff too. For example, crowds get bored if you're inactive for too long, crashing a lot or going too slow – they whistle and jeer. However, if you're really flying, they liven up, start cheering and use their air horns."



Er, anyone seen the road?

09 **PIKE'S PEAK:** Ridgway: "One of the artists we had working on Pike's Peak almost broke when he was doing it. That's because he was dealing with the constraints of the PC and the engine, and was trying to get the thing to fit in the memory available. Most tracks are five or six kilometres long and Pike's Peak is near enough 14km. So as you can imagine, this meant that it was very hard to try and get all the detail right.

"With Pike's Peak, it's the evolution of the track. You start off in a forested area, then as you go up through the height layers, the foliage changes and becomes more wispy as it gets drier. Then you get to the very top where it's just literally just barren rocks and the big vista in the distance. Performance-wise, it wasn't too much of an issue because the Neon engine can break the world down into chunks – so it dealt with it quite well and the performance wasn't too bad. It was just literally trying to fit everything in memory for that track that was the problem. But in the end, we managed it." PCZ


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How are you feeling right now?

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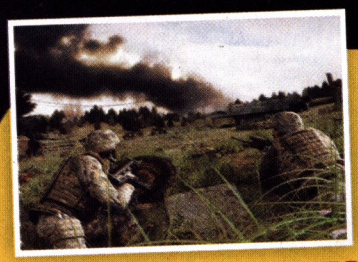
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Credit: NASA Centre, Hubble Space Telescope Centre.

NEXT MONTH

GEARBOX'S SECRET GAME!

We unveil the ground-breaking new shooter from the men behind *Brothers In Arms*. You've honestly never seen anything like it...



OPERATION FLASHPOINT 2
Codemasters kickstart a new age of open warfare. Can they match the original?



THE FUTURE OF WOW
Blizzard speak out on the latest expansion set to rock Azeroth to its very core...



EPIC FEATURES
They're both almost here! Behold the long-awaited *UT3* vs *Gears Of War* face-off!



WORLD IN CONFLICT REVIEW
The '80s and big Russian tanks combined in RTS form. Has Massive's tale of nukes and destruction got it all sewn up?



STRANGLEHOLD REVIEW
Can Jon Woo's blend of birds and bullets match his movies?

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PCZONE ON THE DVD

ALSO! **Steve Hill goes all gung-ho in the army, Wandy amazes with his hardware skills and Jon Blyth dances a sexy dance!**

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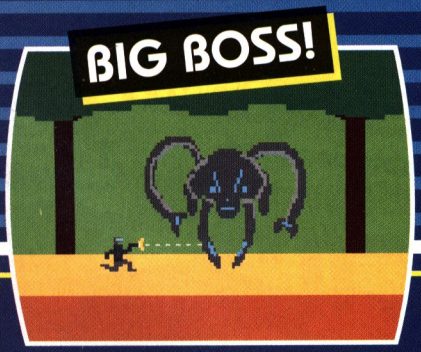
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